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LADY FREDERICK

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD.

LADY FREDERICK

A COMEDY

In Three Acts

BY W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD.
MCMXXVII.

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This play was produced at the Court Theatre on Saturday, October 26, 1907, with the following cast:

Lady Frederick Berolles	Ethel Irving
Sir Gerald O'Mara	Edmund Breon
Mr. Paradine Fouldes	C. M. Lowne
Marchioness of Mereston	Beryl Faber
Marquess of Mereston	W. Graham Brown
Captain Montgomerie	Arthur Holmes-Gore
Admiral Carlisle	E. W. Garden
Rose	Beatrice Terry
Lady Frederick's Dressmaker	Florence Wood
Lady Frederick's Footman	Claude Vernon
Lady Frederick's Maid	Ina Pelly
Thompson	Reginald Eyre
A Waiter	Heath J. Haviland

LADY FREDERICK

CHARACTERS

LADY FREDERICK BEROLLES
SIR GERALD O'MARA
MR. PARADINE FOULDES
MARCHIONESS OF MERESTON
MARQUESS OF MERESTON
ADMIRAL CARLISLE
ROSE
LADY FREDERICK'S DRESSMAKER
LADY FREDERICK'S FOOTMAN
LADY FREDERICK'S MAID
THOMPSON
A WAITER AT THE HOTEL SPLENDIDE

TIME: *The Present Day*

ACTS I and II—*Drawing-room at the Hotel Splendide, Monte Carlo.*

ACT III—*Lady Frederick's Dressing-Room*

All information and applications for permission to perform this play by Amateurs should be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26, Southampton Street, Strand, W.C. 2.

LADY FREDERICK

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *Drawing-room of the Hotel Splendide at Monte Carlo. A large, handsomely furnished room, with doors right and left, and French windows at the back leading to a terrace. Through these is seen the starry southern night. On one side is a piano, on the other a table with papers neatly laid out on it. There is a lighted stove.*

LADY MERESTON, *in evening dress, rather magnificently attired, is reading the papers. She is a handsome woman of forty. She puts down the paper impatiently and rings the bell. A servant answers. He has a French accent.*

LADY MERESTON.

Did Mr. Paradine Fouldes come this evening?

SERVANT.

Yes, miladi.

LADY MERESTON.

Is he in the hotel now?

SERVANT.

Yes, miladi.

LADY MERESTON.

Will you send some one up to his room to say I'm waiting to see him?

SERVANT.

Pardon, miladi, but the gentleman say 'e was on no account to be disturbed.

LADY MERESTON.

Nonsense. Mr. Fouldes is my brother. You must go to him immediately.

SERVANT.

Mr. Fouldes his valet is in the 'all. Will your ladyship speak with him?

LADY MERESTON.

Mr. Fouldes is more difficult to see than a cabinet minister. Send his servant to me.

SERVANT.

Very good, miladi.

[*Exit Servant, and presently* THOMPSON, Mr. Fouldes' *man, comes in.*

THOMPSON.

Your ladyship wished to see me.

LADY MERESTON.

Good evening, Thompson. I hope you had a comfortable journey.

THOMPSON.

Yes, my lady. Mr. Fouldes always has a comfortable journey.

LADY MERESTON.

Was the sea calm when you crossed?

THOMPSON.

Yes, my lady. Mr. Fouldes would look upon it as a great liberty if the sea was not calm.

LADY MERESTON.

Will you tell Mr. Fouldes that I should like to see him at once?

THOMPSON.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Excuse me, my lady, but Mr. Fouldes said no one was to disturb him till ten o'clock. It's more than my place is worth to go to him at five minutes to.

LADY MERESTON.

But what on earth's he doing?

THOMPSON.

I don't know at all, my lady.

LADY MERESTON.

How long have you been with Mr. Foulides?

THOMPSON.

Twenty-five years, my lady.

LADY MERESTON.

I should have thought you knew how he spent every minute of his day.

[PARADINE *comes in. He is a very well dressed man of forty-odd. Self-possessed, worldly, urbane. He is never at a loss or put out of countenance. He overhears* LADY MERESTON'S *last words.*

FOULDES.

When I engaged Thompson I told him the first thing he must learn was the very difficult feat of keeping his eyes open and shut at one and the same time.

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Paradine, I've been waiting to see you for the last two hours. How tiresome you are.

FOULDES.

You may give me a kiss, Maud, but don't be rough.

LADY MERESTON.

[*Kissing his cheek.*] You ridiculous creature. You really might have come to see me at once.

FOULDES.

My dear, you cannot grudge me a little repose after a long and tedious journey. I had to repair the ravages to my person caused by twenty-seven hours in the train.

LADY MERESTON.

Don't be so absurd. I'm sure your person is never ravished.

FOULDES.

Ravaged, my dear, ravaged. I should look upon it as an affectation at my age if I were not a little upset by the journey from London to Monte Carlo.

LADY MERESTON.

I'll be bound you ate a very hearty dinner.

FOULDES.

Thompson, did I eat any dinner at all?

THOMPSON.

[*Stolidly.*] Soup, sir.

FOULDES.

I remember looking at it.

THOMPSON.

Fish, sir.

FOULDES.

I trifled with a fried sole.

THOMPSON.

Bouchées à la Reine, sir.

FOULDES.

They have left absolutely no impression upon me.

THOMPSON.

Tournedos à la Splendide.

FOULDES.

They were distinctly tough, Thompson. You must lodge a complaint in the proper quarter.

THOMPSON.

Roast pheasant, sir.

FOULDES.

Yes, yes, now you mention it, I do remember the pheasant.

THOMPSON.

Chocolate ice sir.

FOULDES.

It was too cold, Thompson. It was distinctly too cold.

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Paradine, I think you dined uncommonly well.

FOULDES.

I have reached an age when love, ambition and wealth pale into insignificance beside a really well-grilled steak. That'll do, Thompson.

THOMPSON.

Very well, sir.

[*He goes out.*

LADY MERESTON.

It's too bad of you, Paradine, to devour a substantial meal when I'm eating out my very heart with anxiety.

FOULDES.

It seems to agree with you very well. I've not seen you look better for years.

LADY MERESTON.

For heaven's sake be serious and listen to me.

FOULDES.

I started immediately I got your telegram. Pray tell me what I can do for you?

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Paradine, Charlie's head over ears in love.

FOULDES.

It's not altogether an unexpected condition for a young man of twenty-two. If the lady's respectable, marry him and resign yourself to being a dowager. If she's not, give her five hundred pounds and pack her off to Paris or London or wherever else she habitually practises her arts and graces.

LADY MERESTON.

I wish I could. But who d'you think it is?

FOULDES.

My dear, there's nothing I detest more than riddles. I can imagine quite a number of fair ladies who would look without disdain upon a young marquess with fifty thousand a year.

LADY MERESTON.

Lady Frederick Berolles.

FOULDES.

By Jupiter!

LADY MERESTON.

She's fifteen years older than he is.

FOULDES.

Then she's not old enough to be his mother, which is a distinct advantage.

LADY MERESTON

She dyes her hair.

FOULDES.

She dyes it uncommonly well.

LADY MERESTON.

She paints.

FOULDES.

Much better than a Royal Academician.

LADY MERESTON.

And poor Charlie's simply infatuated. He rides with her all the morning, motors with her all the afternoon, and gambles with her half the night. I never see him.

FOULDES.

But why should you think Lady Frederick cares two straws for him ?

LADY MERESTON.

Don't be ridiculous, Paradine. Every one knows she hasn't a penny, and she's crippled with debts.

FOULDES.

One has to keep up appearances in this world. Life nowadays for the woman of fashion is a dilemma of which one horn is the Bankruptcy Court and the other —dear Sir Francis Jeune.

LADY MERESTON.

I wish I knew how she manages to dress so beautifully. It's one of the injustices of fate that clothes

only hang on a woman really well when she's lost every shred of reputation.

FOULDES.

My dear, you must console yourself with the thought that she'll probably frizzle for it hereafter.

LADY MERESTON.

I hope I'm not wicked, Paradine, but to wear draperies and wings in the next world offers me no compensation for looking dowdy in a Paquin gown in this.

FOULDES.

I surmised she was on the verge of bankruptcy when I heard she'd bought a new motor. And you seriously think Charlie wants to marry her?

LADY MERESTON.

I'm sure of it.

FOULDES.

And what d'you want me to do?

LADY MERESTON.

Good heavens, I want you to prevent it. After all he has a magnificent position; he's got every chance of making a career for himself. There's no reason why he shouldn't be Prime Minister—it's not fair to the boy to let him marry a woman like that.

FOULDES.

Of course you know Lady Frederick?

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Paradine, we're the greatest friends. You don't suppose I'm going to give her the advantage of quarrelling with me. I think I shall ask her to luncheon to meet you.

FOULDES.

Women have such an advantage over men in affairs of this sort. They're troubled by no scruples, and, like George Washington, never hesitate to lie.

LADY MERESTON.

I look upon her as an abandoned creature, and I tell you frankly I shall stop at nothing to save my son from her clutches.

FOULDES.

Only a thoroughly good woman could so calmly announce her intention of using the crookedest ways to gain her ends.

LADY MERESTON.

[*Looking at him.*] There must be some incident in her career which she wouldn't like raked up. If we could only get hold of that. . . .

FOULDES.

[*Blandly.*] How d'you imagine I can help you?

LADY MERESTON.

A reformed burglar is always the best detective.

FOULDES.

My dear, I wish you could be frank without being sententious.

LADY MERESTON.

You've run through two fortunes, and if we all got our deserts you would be starving now instead of being richer than ever.

FOULDES.

My second cousins have a knack of dying at the psychological moment.

LADY MERESTON.

You've been a horrid, dissipated wretch all your life, and heaven knows the disreputable people who've been your bosom friends.

FOULDES.

With my knowledge of the world and your entire lack of scruple we should certainly be a match for one defenceless woman.

LADY MERESTON.

[*Looking at him sharply.*] Common report says that at one time you were very much in love with her.

FOULDES.

Common report is an ass whose long ears only catch its own braying.

LADY MERESTON.

I was wondering how far things went. If you could tell Charlie of the relations between you. . . .

FOULDES.

My good Maud, there were no relations—unfortunately.

LADY MERESTON.

Poor George was very uneasy about you at the time.

FOULDES.

Your deceased husband, being a strictly religious man, made a point of believing the worst about his neighbours.

LADY MERESTON.

Don't, Paradine; I know you didn't like one another, but remember that I loved him with all my heart. I shall never get over his death.

FOULDES.

My dear girl, you know I didn't mean to wound you.

LADY MERESTON.

After all, it was largely your fault. He was deeply religious, and as the president of the Broad Church Union he couldn't countenance your mode of life

FOULDES.

[*With great unction.*] Thank God in my day I've been a miserable sinner!

LADY MERESTON.

[*Laughing.*] You're quite incurable, Paradine. But you will help me now. Since his father's death, the boy and I have lived a very retired life, and now we're quite helpless. It would break my heart if Charlie married that woman.

FOULDES.

I'll do my best. I think I can promise you that nothing will come of it.

[*The door is flung open, and* LADY FREDERICK *enters, followed by* MERESTON, *a young boyish man of twenty-two; by her brother,* SIR GERALD O'MARA, *a handsome fellow of six-and-twenty; by* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE, ADMIRAL CARLISLE, *and* ROSE, *his daughter.* LADY FREDERICK *is a handsome Irish woman of thirty to thirty-five, beautifully dressed. She is very vivacious, and light-hearted. She has all the Irish recklessness and unconcern for the morrow. Whenever she wants to get round anybody she falls into an Irish brogue, and then, as she knows very well, she is quite irresistible.* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *is a polished, well-groomed man of thirty-five, with suave manners.* THE ADMIRAL *is bluff and downright.* ROSE *is a pretty ingénue of nineteen.*

LADY MERESTON.

Here they are.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Enthusiastically going to him with open arms.*] Paradine! Paradine! Paradine!

MERESTON.

Oh, my prophetic soul, mine uncle!

FOULDES.

[*Shaking hands with* LADY FREDERICK.] I heard you were at the Casino.

LADY FREDERICK.

Charlie lost all his money, so I brought him away.

LADY MERESTON.

I wish you wouldn't gamble, Charlie dear.

MERESTON.

My dear mother, I've only lost ten thousand francs.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*To* PARADINE FOULDES.] I see you're in your usual robust health.

FOULDES.

You needn't throw it in my face. I shall probably be very unwell to-morrow.

LADY FREDERICK.

D'you know Admiral Carlisle? This is my brother Gerald.

FOULDES.

[*Shaking hands.*] How d'you do?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Introducing.*] Captain Montgomerie.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I think we've met before.

FOULDES.

I'm very pleased to hear it. How d'you do. [*To* MERESTON.] Are you having a good time in Monte Carlo, Charles?

MERESTON.

A 1, thanks.

FOULDES.

And what do you do with yourself?

MERESTON.

Oh, hang about generally, you know—and there's always the tables.

FOULDES.

That's right, my boy; I'm glad to see that you prepare yourself properly for your duties as a hereditary legislator.

MERESTON.

[*Laughing.*] Oh, shut it, Uncle Paradine.

FOULDES.

I rejoice also to find that you have already a certain command of the vernacular.

MERESTON.

Well, if you can browbeat a London cabby and hold your own in repartee with a barmaid, it oughtn't to be difficult to get on all right in the House of Lords.

FOULDES.

But let me give you a solemn warning. You have a magnificent chance, dear boy, with all the advantages of wealth and station. I beseech you not to throw it away by any exhibition of talent. The field is clear and the British people are waiting for a leader. But remember that the British people like their leaders dull. Capacity they mistrust, versatility they cannot bear, and wit they utterly abhor. Look at the fate of poor Lord Parnaby. His urbanity gained him the premiership, but his brilliancy overthrew him. How could the fortunes of the nation be safe with a man whose speeches were pointed and sparkling, whose mind was so quick, so agile, that it reminded you of a fencer's play? Every one is agreed that Lord Parnaby is flippant and unsubstantial; we doubt his principles and we have grave fears about his morality. Take warning, my dear boy, take warning. Let the sprightly epigram never lighten the long periods of your speech nor the Attic salt flavour the roast beef of your conversation. Be careful that your metaphors show no imagination and conceal your brains as you would a discreditable secret. Above all, if you have a sense of humour, crush it. Crush it.

MERESTON.

My dear uncle, you move me very much. I will be as stupid as an owl.

FOULDES.

There's a good, brave boy.

MERESTON.

I will be heavy and tedious.

FOULDES.

I see already the riband of the Garter adorning your shirt-front. Remember, there's no damned merit about that.

MERESTON.

None shall listen to my speeches without falling into a profound sleep.

FOULDES.

[*Seizing his hand.*] The premiership itself is within your grasp.

LADY MERESTON.

Dear Paradine, let us take a stroll on the terrace before we go to bed.

FOULDES.

And you shall softly whisper all the latest scandal in my ear.

[*He puts on her cloak and they go out.*

LADY FREDERICK.

May I speak to you, Admiral?

ADMIRAL.

Certainly, certainly. What can I do for you?

[*While* LADY FREDERICK *and the* ADMIRAL *talk, the others go slowly out. Through the conversation she uses her Irish brogue.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Are you in a good temper?

ADMIRAL.

Fairly, fairly.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm glad of that because I want to make you a proposal of marriage.

ADMIRAL.

My dear Lady Frederick, you take me entirely by surprise.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Not on my own behalf, you know.

ADMIRAL.

Oh, I see.

LADY FREDERICK.

The fact is, my brother Gerald has asked your daughter to marry him, and she has accepted.

ADMIRAL.

Rose is a minx, Lady Frederick, and she's much too young to marry.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now don't fly into a passion. We're going to talk it over quite calmly.

ADMIRAL.

I tell you I won't hear of it. The boy's penniless.

LADY FREDERICK.

That's why it's so lucky you're rich.

ADMIRAL.

Eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

You've been talking of buying a place in Ireland. You couldn't want anything nicer than Gerald's—gravel soil, you know. And you simply dote on Elizabethan architecture.

ADMIRAL.

I can't bear it.

LADY FREDERICK.

How fortunate, then, that the house was burnt down in the eighteenth century and rebuilt in the best Georgian style.

ADMIRAL.

Ugh.

LADY FREDERICK.

And you'd love to have little grandsons to dandle on your knee.

ADMIRAL.

How do I know they wouldn't be girls?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, it's most unusual in our family.

ADMIRAL.

I tell you I won't hear of it.

LADY FREDERICK.

You know, it's not bad to have the oldest baronetcy in the country but one.

ADMIRAL.

I suppose I shall have to pack Rose off to England.

LADY FREDERICK.

And break her heart?

ADMIRAL.

Women's hearts are like old china, none the worse for a break or two.

LADY FREDERICK.

Did you ever know my husband, Admiral?

ADMIRAL.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

I was married to him at seventeen because my mother thought it a good match, and I was desperately in love with another man. Before we'd been married a fortnight he came home blind drunk, and I had never seen a drunken man before. Then I found out he was a confirmed tippler. I was so ashamed. If you only knew what my life was for the ten years I lived with him. I've done a lot of foolish things in my time, but, my God, I have suffered.

ADMIRAL.

Yes, I know, I know.

LADY FREDERICK.

And believe me, when two young things love one another it's better to let them marry. Love is so very rare in this world. One really ought to make the most of it when it's there.

ADMIRAL.

I'm very sorry, but I've made up my mind.

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, but won't you alter it—like Nelson. Don't be hard on Rose. She's really in love with Gerald. Do give them a chance. Won't you? Ah, do—there's a dear.

ADMIRAL.

I don't want to hurt your feelings, but Sir Gerald is about the most ineligible young man that I've ever come across.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Triumphantly.*] There, I knew we should agree. That's precisely what I told him this morning.

ADMIRAL.

I understand his place is heavily mortgaged.

LADY FREDERICK.

No one will lend a penny more on it. If they would Gerald would borrow it at once.

ADMIRAL.

He's got nothing but his pay to live upon.

LADY FREDERICK.

And his tastes are very extravagant.

ADMIRAL.

He's a gambler.

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes, but then he's so good looking.

ADMIRAL.

Eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm glad that we agree so entirely about him. Now there's nothing left but to call the young things in. join their hands and give them our united blessing.

ADMIRAL.

Before I consent to this marriage, madam, I'll see your brother——

LADY FREDERICK.

Damned?

ADMIRAL.

Yes, madam, damned.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now listen to me quietly, will you?

ADMIRAL.

I should warn you, Lady Frederick, that when I once make up my mind about a thing, I never change it.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now that is what I really admire. I like a man of character. You know, I've always been impressed by your strength and determination.

ADMIRAL.

I don't know about that. But when I say a thing, I do it.

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes, I know. And in five minutes you're going to say that Gerald may marry your pretty Rose.

ADMIRAL.

No, no, no.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now look here, don't be obstinate. I don't like you when you're obstinate.

ADMIRAL.

I'm not obstinate. I'm firm.

LADY FREDERICK.

After all, Gerald has lots of good qualities. He's simply devoted to your daughter. He's been a little wild, but you know you wouldn't give much for a young man who hadn't.

ADMIRAL.

[*Gruffly.*] I don't want a milksop for a son-in-law.

LADY FREDERICK.

As soon as he's married, he'll settle into a model country squire.

ADMIRAL.

Well, he's a gambler, and I can't get over that.

LADY FREDERICK.

Shall he promise you never to play cards again? Now, don't be horrid. You don't want to make me utterly wretched, do you?

ADMIRAL.

[*Unwillingly.*] Well, I'll tell you what I'll do—they shall marry if he doesn't gamble for a year.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, you duck. [*She impulsively throws her arms round his neck and kisses him. He is a good deal taken aback.*] I beg your pardon, I couldn't help it.

ADMIRAL.

I don't altogether object, you know.

LADY FREDERICK.

Upon my word, in some ways you're rather fascinating.

ADMIRAL.

D'you think so, really?

LADY FREDERICK.

I do indeed.

ADMIRAL.

I rather wish that proposal of marriage had been on your own behalf.

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, with me, dear Admiral, experience triumphs over hope. I must tell the children. [*Calling.*] Gerald, come here. Rose.

[GERALD *and* ROSE *come in.*

LADY FREDERICK.

I always knew your father was a perfect darling, Rose.

ROSE.

Oh, papa, you are a brick.

ADMIRAL.

I thoroughly disapprove of the marriage, my dear, but—it's not easy to say no to Lady Frederick.

GERALD.

It's awfully good of you, Admiral, and I'll do my best to make Rose a ripping husband.

ADMIRAL.

Not so fast, young man, not so fast. There's a condition.

ROSE.

Oh, father!

LADY FREDERICK.

Gerald is to behave himself for a year, and then you may marry.

ROSE.

But won't Gerald grow very dull if he behaves himself?

LADY FREDERICK.

I have no doubt of it. But dullness is the first requisite of a good husband.

ADMIRAL.

Now you must pack off to bed, my dear. I'm going to smoke my pipe before turning in.

ROSE.

[*Kissing* LADY FREDERICK.] Good-night, dearest. I'll never forget your kindness.

LADY FREDERICK.

You'd better not thank me till you've been married a few years.

ROSE.

[*Holding out her hand to* GERALD.] Good-night.

GERALD.

[*Taking it and looking at her.*] Good-night.

ADMIRAL.

[*Gruffly.*] You may as well do it in front of my face as behind my back.

ROSE.

[*Lifting up her lips.*] Good-night.

[*He kisses her, and the* ADMIRAL *and* ROSE *go out.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh lord, I wish I were eighteen.

[*She sinks into a chair, and an expression of utter weariness comes over her face.*

GERALD.

I say, what's up?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Starting.*] I thought you'd gone. Nothing.

GERALD.

Come, out with it.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my poor boy, if you only knew. I'm so worried that I don't know what on earth to do.

GERALD.

Money?

LADY FREDERICK.

Last year I made a solemn determination to be economical. And it's ruined me.

GERALD.

My dear, how could it?

LADY FREDERICK.

I can't make it out. It seems very unfair. The more I tried not to be extravagant, the more I spent.

GERALD.

Can't you borrow?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] I have borrowed. That's just it.

GERALD.

Well, borrow again.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've tried to. But no one's such a fool as to lend me a penny.

GERALD.

Did you say I'd sign anything they liked?

LADY FREDERICK.

I was so desperate I said we'd both sign anything. It was Dick Cohen.

GERALD.

Oh lord, what did he say?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Imitating a Jewish accent.*] What's the good of wathting a nithe clean sheet of paper, my dear lady?

GERALD.

[*Shouting with laughter.*] By George, don't I know it.

LADY FREDERICK.

For heaven's sake don't let's talk of my affairs. They're in such a state that if I think of them at all I shall have a violent fit of hysterics.

GERALD.

But look here, what d'you really mean?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, if you want it—I owe my dressmaker seven hundred pounds, and last year I signed two horrid bills, one for fifteen hundred and the other for two thousand. They fall due the day after to-morrow,

and if I can't raise the money I shall have to go through the Bankruptcy Court.

GERALD.

By George, that's serious.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's so serious that I can't help thinking something will happen. Whenever I've got in a really tight fix something has turned up and put me on my legs again. Last time, Aunt Elizabeth had an apoplectic fit. But of course it wasn't really very profitable because mourning is so desperately expensive.

GERALD.

Why don't you marry?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my dear Gerald, you know I'm always unlucky at games of chance.

GERALD.

Charlie Mereston's awfully gone on you.

LADY FREDERICK.

That must be obvious to the meanest intelligence.

GERALD.

Well, why don't you have him?

LADY FREDERICK.

Good heavens, I'm old enough to be his mother.

GERALD.

Nonsense. You're only ten years older than he is, and nowadays no nice young man marries a woman younger than himself.

LADY FREDERICK.

He's such a good fellow. I couldn't do him a nasty turn like that.

GERALD.

How about Montgomerie? He simply stinks of money, and he's not a bad sort.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Surprised.*] My dear boy, I hardly know him.

GERALD.

Well, I'm afraid it means marriage or bankruptcy.

LADY FREDERICK.

Here's Charlie. Take him away, there's a dear. I want to talk to Paradine.

Enter PARADINE FOULDES *with* MERESTON.

FOULDES.

What, still here, Lady Frederick?

LADY FREDERICK.

As large as life.

FOULDES.

We've been taking a turn on the terrace.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*To* MERESTON.] And has your astute uncle been pumping you, Charlie?

FOULDES.

Eh, what?

MERESTON.

I don't think he got much out of me.

FOULDES.

[*Good-naturedly.*] All I wanted, dear boy. There's no one so transparent as the person who thinks he's devilish deep. By the way, what's the time?

GERALD.

About eleven, isn't it?

FOULDES.

Ah! How old are you, Charlie?

MERESTON.

Twenty-two.

FOULDES.

Then it's high time you went to bed.

LADY FREDERICK.

Charlie's not going to bed till I tell him. Are you?

MERESTON.

Of course not.

FOULDES.

Has it escaped your acute intelligence, my friend, that I want to talk to Lady Frederick?

MERESTON.

Not at all. But I have no reason to believe that Lady Frederick wants to talk to you.

GERALD.

Let's go and have a game of pills, Charlie.

MERESTON.

D'you want to be left alone with the old villain?

FOULDES.

You show no respect for my dyed hairs, young man.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've not seen him for years, you know.

MERESTON.

Oh, all right. I say, you're coming for a ride to-morrow, aren't you?

LADY FREDERICK.

Certainly. But it must be in the afternoon.

FOULDES.

I'm sorry, but Charles has arranged to motor me over to Nice in the afternoon.

MERESTON.

[*To* LADY FREDERICK.] That'll suit me A 1. I had an engagement, but it was quite unimportant.

LADY FREDERICK

Then that's settled. Good-night.

MERESTON.

Good-night.

[*He goes out with* GERALD. LADY FREDERICK *turns and good-humouredly scrutinises* PARADINE FOULDES.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well?

FOULDES.

Well?

LADY FREDERICK.

You wear excellently, Paradine.

FOULDES.

Thanks.

LADY FREDERICK.

How do you manage it?

FOULDES.

By getting up late and never going to bed early, by eating whatever I like and drinking whenever I'm thirsty, by smoking strong cigars, taking no exercise, and refusing under any circumstances to be bored.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm sorry you had to leave town in such a hurry. Were you amusing yourself?

FOULDES.

I come to the Riviera every year.

LADY FREDERICK.

I daresay, but not so early.

FOULDES.

I've never surrendered so far to middle age as to make habits.

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear Paradine, the day before yesterday, Lady Mereston, quite distracted, went to the post office and sent you the following wire: "Come at once, your help urgently needed. Charlie in toils designing female, Maud." Am I right?

FOULDES.

I never admit even to myself that a well-dressed woman is mistaken.

LADY FREDERICK.

So you started post-haste, bent upon protecting your nephew, and were infinitely surprised to learn that the designing female was no other than your humble servant.

FOULDES.

You'd be irresistible, Lady Frederick, if you didn't know you were so clever.

LADY FREDERICK.

And now what are you going to do?

FOULDES.

My dear lady, I'm not a police officer, but a very harmless, inoffensive old bachelor.

LADY FREDERICK.

With more wiles than the mother of many daughters and the subtlety of a company promoter.

FOULDES.

Maud seems to think that as I've racketted about a little in my time, I'm just the sort of man to deal with you. Set a thief to catch a thief, don't you know? She's rather fond of proverbs.

LADY FREDERICK.

She should have thought rather of: When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war. I hear Lady Mereston has been saying the most agreeable things about me.

FOULDES.

Ah, that's women's fault; they always show their hand. You're the only woman I ever knew who didn't.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a brogue.*] You should have avoided the Blarney Stone when you went to Ireland.

FOULDES.

Look here, d'you want to marry Charlie?

LADY FREDERICK.

Why should I?

FOULDES.

Because he's got fifty thousand a year, and you're head over ears in debt. You've got to raise something like four thousand pounds at once, or you go under. You've got yourself a good deal talked about during the last ten years, but people have stood you because you had plenty of money. If you go broke they'll drop you like a hot potato. And I daresay it wouldn't be inconvenient to change Lady Frederick Berolles into Lady Mereston. My sister has always led me to believe that it is rather attractive to be a Marchioness.

LADY FREDERICK.

Unlike a duchess, its cheap without being gaudy.

FOULDES.

You asked me why you might want to marry a boy from ten to fifteen years younger than yourself, and I've told you.

LADY FREDERICK.

And now perhaps you'll tell me why you're going to interfere in my private concerns?

FOULDES.

Well, you see his mother happens to be my sister, and I'm rather fond of her. It's true her husband was the most sanctimonious prig I've ever met in my life.

LADY FREDERICK.

I remember him well. He was president of the Broad Church Union and wore side-whiskers.

FOULDES.

But she stuck to me through thick and thin. I've been in some pretty tight places in my day, and she's always given me a leg up when I wanted it. I've got an idea it would just about break her heart if Charlie married you.

LADY FREDERICK.

Thanks.

FOULDES.

You know, I don't want to be offensive, but I think it would be a pity myself. And besides, unless I'm much mistaken, I've got a little score of my own that I want to pay off.

LADY FREDERICK.

Have you?

FOULDES.

You've got a good enough memory not to have forgotten that you made a blithering fool of me once. I swore I'd get even with you, and by George, I mean to do it.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] And how do you propose to stop me if I make up my mind that I'm going to accept Charlie?

FOULDES.

Well, he's not proposed yet, has he?

LADY FREDERICK.

Not yet, but I've had to use every trick and device I can think of to prevent him.

FOULDES.

Look here, I'm going to play this game with my cards on the table.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then I shall be on my guard. You're never so dangerous as when you pretend to be frank.

FOULDES.

I'm sorry you should think so badly of me.

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't. Only it was a stroke of genius when Nature put the soul of a Jesuit priest into the body of a Yorkshire squire.

FOULDES.

I wonder what you're paying me compliments for. You must be rather afraid of me.

[*They look at one another for a moment.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, let's look at these cards.

FOULDES.

First of all, there's this money you've got to raise.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well?

FOULDES.

This is my sister's suggestion.

LADY FREDERICK.

That means you don't much like it.

FOULDES.

If you'll refuse the boy and clear out—we'll give you forty thousand pounds.

LADY FREDERICK.

I suppose you'd be rather surprised if I boxed your ears.

FOULDES.

Now, look here, between you and me high falutin's rather absurd, don't you think so? You're in desperate want of money, and I don't suppose it would amuse you much to have a young hobbledehoy hanging about your skirts for the rest of your life.

LADY FREDERICK.

Very well, we'll have no high falutin! You may tell Lady Mereston that if I really wanted the money I shouldn't be such an idiot as to take forty thousand down when I can have fifty thousand a year for the asking.

FOULDES.

I told her that.

LADY FREDERICK.

You showed great perspicacity. Now for the second card.

FOULDES.

My dear, it's no good getting into a paddy over it.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've never been calmer in my life.

FOULDES.

You always had the very deuce of a temper. I suppose you've not given Charlie a sample of it yet, have you?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Not yet.

FOULDES.

Well, the second card's your reputation.

LADY FREDERICK.

But I haven't got any. I thought that such an advantage.

FOULDES.

You see Charlie is a young fool. He thinks you a paragon of all the virtues, and it's never occurred to him that you've rather gone the pace in your time.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's one of my greatest consolations to think that even a hundred horse-power racing motor couldn't be more rapid than I've been.

FOULDES.

Still it'll be rather a shock to Charlie when he hears that this modest flower whom he trembles to adore has. . . .

LADY FREDERICK.

Very nearly eloped with his own uncle. But you won't tell him that story because you hate looking a perfect ass.

FOULDES.

Madam, when duty calls, Paradine Foulds consents even to look ridiculous. But I was thinking of the Bellingham affair.

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, of course, there's the Bellingham affair. I'd forgotten it.

FOULDES.

Nasty little business that, eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

Horrid.

FOULDES.

Don't you think it would choke him off?

LADY FREDERICK.

I think it very probable.

FOULDES.

Well, hadn't you better cave in?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Ringing the bell.*] Ah, but you've not seen my cards yet. [*A servant enters.*] Tell my servant to bring down the despatch-box which is on my writing-table.

SERVANT.

Yes, miladi.

[*Exit.*

FOULDES.

What's up now?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, four or five years ago I was staying at this hotel, and Mimi la Bretonne had rooms here.

FOULDES.

I never heard of the lady, but her name suggests that she had an affectionate nature.

LADY FREDERICK.

She was a little singer at the Folies Bergères, and she had the loveliest emeralds I ever saw.

FOULDES.

But you don't know Maud's.

LADY FREDERICK

The late Lord Mereston had a passion for emeralds. He always thought they were such pure stones.

FOULDES.

[*Quickly.*] I beg your pardon?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, Mimi fell desperately ill, and there was no one to look after her. Of course the pious English ladies in the hotel wouldn't go within a mile of her, so I went and did the usual thing, don't you know.

[LADY FREDERICK'S *man comes in with a small despatch-box which he places on a table. He goes out.* LADY FREDERICK *as she talks, unlocks it.*

FOULDES.

Thank God I'm a bachelor, and no ministering angel ever smoothes my pillow when I particularly want to be left alone.

LADY FREDERICK.

I nursed her more or less through the whole illness, and afterwards she fancied she owed me her worthless little life. She wanted to give me the precious emeralds, and when I refused was so heart-broken that I said I'd take one thing if I might.

FOULDES.

And what was that?

LADY FREDERICK.

A bundle of letters. I'd seen the address on the back of the envelope, and then I recognised the writing. I thought they'd be much safer in my hands than in hers. [*She takes them out of the box and hands them to* PARADINE.] Here they are.

[*He looks and starts violently.*

FOULDES.

89 Grosvenor Square. It's Mereston's writing. You don't mean? What! Ah, ah, ah. [*He bursts into a shout of laughter.*] The old sinner. And Mereston wouldn't have me in the house, if you please, because I was a dissolute libertine. And he was the president of the Broad Church Union. Good Lord, how often have I heard him say: "Gentlemen, I take my stand on the morality, the cleanliness and the purity of English Family Life." Oh, oh, oh.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've often noticed that the religious temperament is very susceptible to the charms of my sex.

FOULDES.

May I look?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, I don't know. I suppose so.

FOULDES.

[*Reading.*] "Heart's delight" . . . And he signs himself, "your darling chickabiddy." The old ruffian.

LADY FREDERICK.

She was a very pretty little thing.

FOULDES.

I daresay, but thank heaven, I have some sense of decency left, and it outrages all my susceptibilities that a man in side-whiskers should call himself anybody's chickabiddy.

LADY FREDERICK.

Protestations of undying affection are never ridiculous when they are accompanied by such splendid emeralds.

FOULDES.

[*Starting and growing suddenly serious.*] And what about Maud?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well?

FOULDES.

Poor girl, it'd simply break her heart. He preached at her steadily for twenty years, and she worshipped the very ground he trod on. She'd have died of grief at his death except she felt it her duty to go on with his work.

LADY FREDERICK.

I know.

FOULDES.

By Jove, it's a good card. You were quite right to refuse the emeralds: these letters are twice as valuable.

LADY FREDERICK.

Would you like to burn them?

FOULDES.

Betsy!

LADY FREDERICK.

There's the stove. Put them in.

[*He takes them up in both hands and hurries to the stove. But he stops and brings them back, he throws them on the sofa.*

FOULDES.

No, I won't.

LADY FREDERICK.

Why not?

FOULDES.

It's too dooced generous. I'll fight you tooth and nail, but it's not fair to take an advantage over me like that. You'll bind my hands with fetters.

LADY FREDERICK.

Very well. You've had your chance.

FOULDES.

But, by Jove, you must have a good hand to throw away a card like that. What have you got—a straight flush?

LADY FREDERICK.

I may be only bluffing, you know.

FOULDES.

Lord, it does me good to hear your nice old Irish brogue again.

LADY FREDERICK.

Faith, and does it?

FOULDES.

I believe you only put it on to get over people.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Smiling.*] Begorrah, it's not easy to get over you.

FOULDES.

Lord, I was in love with you once, wasn't I?

LADY FREDERICK.

Not more than lots of other people have been

FOULDES.

And you did treat me abominably.

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, that's what they all said. But you got over it very well.

FOULDES.

I didn't. My digestion was permanently impaired by your brutal treatment.

LADY FREDERICK.

Is that why you went to Carlsbad afterwards instead of the Rocky Mountains?

FOULDES.

You may laugh, but the fact remains that I've only been in love once, and that was with you.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Smiling as she holds out her hand.*] Good-night.

FOULDES.

For all that I'm going to fight you now for all I'm worth.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm not frightened of you, Paradine.

FOULDES.

Good-night.

[*As he goes out,* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *enters.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Yawning and stretching her arms.*] Oh I'm so sleepy.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I'm sorry for that. I wanted to have a talk with you.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Smiling.*] I daresay I can keep awake for five minutes, you know—especially if you offer me a cigarette.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Here you are.

[*He hands her his case and lights her cigarette.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a sigh.*] Oh, what a comfort.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I wanted to tell you, I had a letter this morning from my solicitor to say that he's just bought Crowley Castle on my behalf.

LADY FREDERICK.

Really. But it's a lovely place. You must ask me to come and stay.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I should like you to stay there indefinitely.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a quick look.*] That's charming of you, but I never desert my London long.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Smiling.*] I have a very nice house in Portman Square.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Surprised.*] Really?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

And I'm thinking of going into Parliament at the next election.

LADY FREDERICK.

It appears to be a very delightful pastime to govern the British nation, dignified without being laborious.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Lady Frederick, although I've been in the service I have rather a good head for business, and I hate beating about the bush. I wanted to ask you to marry me.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's nice of you not to make a fuss about it. I'm very much obliged but I'm afraid I can't.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Why not?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, you see, I don't know you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

We could spend the beginning of our married life so usefully in making one another's acquaintance.

LADY FREDERICK.

It would be rather late in the day then to come to the conclusion that we couldn't bear the sight of one another.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Shall I send my banker's book so that you may see that my antecedents are respectable and my circumstances—such as to inspire affection.

LADY FREDERICK.

I have no doubt it would be very interesting—but not to me.

[*She makes as if to go.*

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Ah, don't go yet. Won't you give me some reason?

LADY FREDERICK.

If you insist. I'm not in the least in love with you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

D'you think that much matters?

LADY FREDERICK.

You're a friend of Gerald's, and he says you're a very good sort. But I really can't marry every one that Gerald rather likes.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

He said he'd put in a good word for me.

LADY FREDERICK.

If I ever marry again it shall be to please myself, not to please my brother.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I hope I shall induce you to alter your mind.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm afraid I can give you no hope of that.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

You know, when I determine to do a thing, I generally do it.

LADY FREDERICK.

That sounds very like a threat.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

You may take it as such if you please.

LADY FREDERICK

And you've made up your mind that you're going to marry me?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Quite.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, I've made up mine that you shan't. So we're quits.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Why don't you talk to your brother about it?

LADY FREDERICK.

Because it's no business of his.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Isn't it? Ask him!

LADY FREDERICK.

What do you mean by that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Ask him? Good-night.

LADY FREDERICK.

Good-night. [*He goes out.* LADY FREDERICK *goes to the French window that leads to the terrace and calls.*] Gerald!

GERALD.

Hulloa! [*He appears and comes into the room.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Did you know that Captain Montgomerie was going to propose to me?

GERALD.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

Is there any reason why I should marry him?

GERALD.

Only that I owe him nine hundred pounds.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Aghast.*] Oh, why didn't you tell me?

GERALD.

You were so worried, I couldn't. Oh, I've been such a fool. I tried to make a *coup* for Rose's sake.

LADY FREDERICK.

Is it a gambling debt?

GERALD.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Ironically.*] What they call a debt of honour?

GERALD.

I must pay it the day after to-morrow without fail.

LADY FREDERICK.

But that's the day my two bills fall due. And if you don't?

GERALD.

I shall have to send in my papers, and I shall lose Rosie. And then I shall blow out my silly brains.

LADY FREDERICK.

But who is the man?

GERALD.

He's the son of Aaron Levitzki, the money-lender.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Half-comic, half-aghast.*] Oh lord!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is the same as in ACT I. ADMIRAL CARLISLE *is sleeping in an armchair with a handkerchief over his face.* ROSE *is sitting on a grandfather's chair, and* GERALD *is leaning over the back.*

ROSE.

Isn't papa a perfectly adorable chaperon?

[*The* ADMIRAL *snores.*

GERALD.

Perfectly. [*A pause.*

ROSE.

I've started fifteen topics of conversation in the last quarter of an hour, Gerald.

GERALD.

[*Smiling.*] Have you?

ROSE.

You always agree with me, and there's an end of it. So I have to rack my brains again.

GERALD.

All you say is so very wise and sensible. Of course I agree.

ROSE.

I wonder if you'll think me sensible and wise in ten years.

GERALD.

I'm quite sure I shall.

ROSE.

Why, then, I'm afraid we shan't cultivate any great brilliancy of repartee.

GERALD.

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.

ROSE.

Oh, don't say that. When a man's in love, he at once makes a pedestal of the Ten Commandments and stands on the top of them with his arms akimbo. When a woman's in love she doesn't care two straws for Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not.

GERALD.

When a woman's in love she can put her heart on the slide of a microscope and examine how it beats. When a man's in love, what do you think he cares for science and philosophy and all the rest of it!

ROSE.

When a man's in love he can only write sonnets to the moon. When a woman's in love she can still cook his dinner and darn her own stockings.

GERALD.

I wish you wouldn't cap all my observations.

[*She lifts up her face, and he kisses her lips.*

ROSE.

I'm beginning to think you're rather nice, you know.

GERALD.

That's reassuring, at all events.

ROSE.

But no one could accuse you of being a scintillating talker.

GERALD.

Have you ever watched the lovers in the Park sitting on the benches hour after hour without saying a word?

ROSE.

Why?

GERALD.

Because I've always thought that they must be bored to the verge of tears. Now I know they're only happy.

ROSE.

You're certainly my soldier, so I suppose I'm your nursery-maid.

GERALD.

You know, when I was at Trinity College, Dublin——

ROSE.

[*Interrupting.*] Were you there? I thought you went to Oxford.

GERALD.

No, why?

ROSE.

Only all my people go to Magdalen.

GERALD.

Yes.

ROSE.

And I've decided that if I ever have a son he shall go there too.

[*The* ADMIRAL *starts and pulls the handkerchief off his face. The others do not notice him. He is aghast and astounded at the conversation.* LADY FREDERICK *comes in later and stands smiling as she listens.*

GERALD.

My darling, you know I hate to thwart you in any way, but I've quite made up my mind that my son shall go to Dublin as I did.

ROSE.

I'm awfully sorry, Gerald, but the boy must be educated like a gentleman.

GERALD.

There I quite agree, Rose, but first of all he's an Irishman, and it's right that he should be educated in Ireland.

ROSE.

Darling Gerald, a mother's love is naturally the safest guide in these things.

GERALD.

Dearest Rose, a father's wisdom is always the most reliable.

LADY FREDERICK.

Pardon my interfering, but—aren't you just a little previous?

ADMIRAL.

[*Bursting out.*] Did you ever hear such a conversation in your life between a young unmarried couple?

ROSE.

My dear papa, we must be prepared for everything.

ADMIRAL.

In my youth young ladies did not refer to things of that sort.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, I don't suppose they're any the worse for having an elementary knowledge of natural history. Personally I doubt whether ignorance is quite the same thing as virtue, and I'm not quite sure that a girl makes a better wife because she's been brought up like a perfect fool.

ADMIRAL.

I am old-fashioned, Lady Frederick; and my idea of a modest girl is that when certain topics are

mentioned she should swoon. Swoon, madam, swoon. They always did it when I was a lad.

ROSE.

Well, father, I've often tried to faint when I wanted something that you wouldn't give me, and I've never been able to manage it. So I'm sure I couldn't swoon.

ADMIRAL.

And with regard to this ridiculous discussion as to which University your son is to be sent, you seem to forget that I have the right to be consulted.

GERALD.

My dear Admiral, I don't see how it can possibly matter to you.

ADMIRAL.

And before we go any further I should like you to know that the very day Rose was born I determined that her son should go to Cambridge.

ROSE.

My dear papa, I think Gerald and I are far and away the best judges of our son's welfare.

ADMIRAL.

The boy must work, Rose. I will have no good-for-nothing as my grandson.

GERALD.

Exactly. And that is why I'm resolved he shall go to Dublin.

ROSE.

The important thing is that he should have really nice manners, and that they teach at Oxford if they teach nothing else.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, don't you think you'd better wait another twenty years or so before you discuss this?

ADMIRAL.

There are some matters which must be settled at once, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK.

You know, young things are fairly independent nowadays. I don't know what they'll be in twenty years' time.

GERALD.

The first thing the boy shall learn is obedience.

ROSE.

Certainly. There's nothing so hateful as a disobedient child.

ADMIRAL.

I can't see my grandson venturing to disobey me.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then you're all agreed. So that's settled. I came to tell you your carriage was ready.

ADMIRAL.

Go and put on your bonnet, Rose. [*To* LADY FREDERICK.] Are you coming with us?

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm afraid I can't. Au revoir.

ADMIRAL.

A tout à l'heure.

[*He and* ROSE *go out.*

GERALD.

Have you ever seen in your life any one so entirely delightful as Rose?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Only when I've looked in the glass.

GERALD.

My dear Elizabeth, how vain you are.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're very happy, my Gerald.

GERALD.

It's such a relief to have got over all the difficulties. I thought it never would come right. You are a brick, Elizabeth.

LADY FREDERICK.

I really think I am rather.

GERALD.

The moment you promised to arrange things I felt as safe as a house.

LADY FREDERICK.

I said I'd do my best, didn't I? And I told you not to worry.

GERALD.

[*Turning round suddenly.*] Isn't it all right?

LADY FREDERICK.

No, it's about as wrong as it can possibly be. I knew Cohen was staying here, and I thought I could get him to hold the bills over for a few days.

GERALD.

And won't he?

LADY FREDERICK.

He hasn't got them any more.

GERALD.

[*Startled.*] What!

LADY FREDERICK.

They've been negotiated, and he swears he doesn't know who has them.

GERALD.

But who could have been such a fool?

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know, that's just the awful part of it. It was bad enough before. I knew the worst Cohen could do, but now. . . . It couldn't be Paradine.

GERALD.

And then there's Montgomerie.

LADY FREDERICK.

I shall see him to-day.

GERALD.

What are you going to say to him?

LADY FREDERICK.

I haven't an idea. I'm rather frightened of him.

GERALD.

You know, dear, if the worst comes to the worst. . . .

LADY FREDERICK.

Whatever happens you shall marry Rose. I promise you that.

[PARADINE FOULDES *appears.*

FOULDES.

May I come in?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Gaily.*] It's a public room. I don't see how we can possibly prevent you.

GERALD.

I'm just going to take a stroll.

LADY FREDERICK.

Do.

[*He goes out.*

FOULDES.

Well? How are things going?

LADY FREDERICK.

Quite well, thank you.

FOULDES.

I've left Charlie with his mother. I hope you can spare him for a couple of hours.

LADY FREDERICK.

I told him he must spend the afternoon with her. I don't approve of his neglecting his filial duty.

FOULDES.

Ah! . . . I saw Dick Cohen this morning.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Quickly.*] Did you?

FOULDES.

It seems to interest you?

LADY FREDERICK.

Not at all. Why should it?

FOULDES.

[*Smiling.*] Nice little man, isn't he?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Good humouredly.*] I wish I had something to throw at you.

FOULDES.

[*With a laugh.*] Well, I haven't got the confounded bills. I was too late.

LADY FREDERICK.

Did you try?

FOULDES.

Oh—yes. I thought it would interest Charlie to know how extremely needful it was for you to marry him.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then who on earth has got them?

FOULDES.

I haven't an idea, but they must make you very uncomfortable. Three thousand five hundred, eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

Don't say it all at once. It sounds so much.

FOULDES.

You wouldn't like to exchange those letters of Mereston's for seven thousand pounds, would you?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] No.

FOULDES.

Ah. . . . By the way, d'you mind if I tell Charlie the full story of your—relations with me?

LADY FREDERICK.

Why should I? It's not I who'll look ridiculous.

FOULDES.

Thanks. I may avail myself of your permission.

LADY FREDERICK.

I daresay you've noticed that Charlie has a very keen sense of humour.

FOULDES.

If you're going to be disagreeable to me I shall go. [*He stops.*] I say, are you quite sure there's nothing else that can be brought up against you?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Quite sure, thanks.

FOULDES.

My sister's very jubilant to-day. What about the Bellingham affair?

LADY FREDERICK.

Merely scandal, my friend.

FOULDES.

Well, look out. She's a woman, and she'll stick at nothing.

LADY FREDERICK.

I wonder why you warn me.

FOULDES.

For the sake of old times, my dear.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're growing sentimental, Paradine. It's the punishment which the gods inflict on a cynic when he grows old.

FOULDES.

It may be, but for the life of me I can't forget that once——

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Interrupting.*] My dear friend, don't rake up my lamentable past.

FOULDES.

I don't think I've met any one so entirely devoid of sentiment as you are.

LADY FREDERICK.

Let us agree that I have every vice under the sun and have done with it.

[*A* SERVANT *comes in.*]

SERVANT.

Madame Claude wishes to see your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my dressmaker.

FOULDES.

Another bill?

LADY FREDERICK.

That's the worst of Monte. One meets as many creditors as in Bond Street. Say I'm engaged.

SERVANT.

Madame Claude says she will wait till miladi is free.

FOULDES.

You make a mistake. One should always be polite to people whose bills one can't pay.

LADY FREDERICK.

Show her in.

SERVANT.

Yes, miladi. [*Exit* SERVANT.

FOULDES.

Is it a big one?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, no; only seven hundred pounds.

FOULDES.

By Jove.

LADY FREDERICK

My dear friend, one must dress. I can't go about in fig-leaves.

FOULDES.

One can dress simply.

LADY FREDERICK.

I do. That's why it costs so much.

FOULDES.

You know, you're devilish extravagant.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm not. I'm content with the barest necessities of existence.

FOULDES.

You've got a maid.

LADY FREDERICK.

Of course I've got a maid. I was never taught to dress myself.

FOULDES.

And you've got a footman.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've always had a footman. And my mother always had a footman. I couldn't live a day without him.

FOULDES.

What does he do for you?

LADY FREDERICK.

He inspires confidence in tradesmen.

FOULDES.

And you have the most expensive suite of rooms in the hotel.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm in such a dreadful mess. If I hadn't got nice rooms I should brood over it.

FOULDES.

Then, as if that weren't enough, you fling your money away at the tables.

LADY FREDERICK.

When you're as poor as I am, a few louis more or less can make absolutely no difference.

FOULDES.

[*With a laugh.*] You're quite incorrigible.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's really not my fault. I do try to be economical, but money slips through my fingers like water. I can't help it.

FOULDES.

You want a sensible sort of a man to look after you.

LADY FREDERICK.

I want a very rich sort of a man to look after me.

FOULDES.

If you were my wife, I should advertise in the papers that I wasn't responsible for your debts.

LADY FREDERICK.

If you were my husband, I'd advertise immediately underneath that I wasn't responsible for your manners.

FOULDES.

I wonder why you're so reckless.

LADY FREDERICK.

When my husband was alive I was so utterly wretched. And afterwards, when I looked forward to a little happiness, my boy died. Then I didn't care any more. I did everything I could to stupefy myself. I squandered money as other women take morphia—that's all.

FOULDES.

It's the same dear scatter-brained, good-hearted Betsy that I used to know.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're the only person who calls me Betsy now. To all the others I'm only Elizabeth.

FOULDES.

Look here, what are you going to do with this dressmaker?

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know. I always trust to the inspiration of the moment.

FOULDES.

She'll make a devil of a fuss, won't she?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, no; I shall be quite nice to her.

FOULDES.

I daresay. But won't she be very disagreeable to you?

LADY FREDERICK.

You don't know what a way I have with my creditors.

FOULDES.

I know it's not a paying way.

LADY FREDERICK.

Isn't it? I bet you a hundred louis that I offer her the money and she refuses it.

FOULDES.

I'll take that.

LADY FREDERICK.

Here she is.

[MADAME CLAUDE *enters, ushered in by the* SERVANT. *She is a stout, genteel person, very splendidly gowned, with a Cockney accent. Her face is set to sternness, decision to make a scene, and general sourness.*

SERVANT.

Madame Claude.

[*Exit* SERVANT. LADY FREDERICK *goes up to her enthusiastically and takes both her hands.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Best of women. This is a joyful surprise.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Drawing herself up.*] I 'eard quite by chance that your ladyship was at Monte.

LADY FREDERICK.

So you came to see me at once. That was nice of you. You're the very person I wanted to see.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Significantly.*] I'm glad of that, my lady, I must confess.

LADY FREDERICK.

You dear creature. That's one advantage of Monte Carlo, one meets all one's friends. Do you know Mr. Foulde's? This is Madame Claude, an artist, my dear Paradine, a real artist.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Grimly.*] I'm pleased that your ladyship should think so.

FOULDES.

How d'you do.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now, this gown. Look, look, look. In this skirt there's genius, *mon cher.* In the way it hangs my whole character is expressed. Observe the fullness of it, that indicates those admirable virtues which make

me an ornament to Society, while the frill at the bottom just suggests those foibles—you can hardly call them faults—which add a certain grace and interest to my personality. And the flounce. Paradine, I beseech you to look at it carefully. I would sooner have designed this flounce than won the Battle of Waterloo.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Your ladyship is very kind.

LADY FREDERICK.

Not at all, not at all. You remember that rose chiffon. I wore it the other day, and the dear Archduchess came up to me and said: "My dear, my dear." I thought she was going to have a fit. But when she recovered she kissed me on both cheeks and said: "Lady Frederick, you have a dressmaker worth her weight in gold." You heard her, Paradine, didn't you?

FOULDES.

You forget that I only arrived last night.

LADY FREDERICK.

Of course. How stupid of me. She'll be perfectly delighted to hear that you're in Monte Carlo. But I shall have to break it to her gently.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Unmoved.*] I'm sorry to intrude upon your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now what are you talking about? If you hadn't come to see me I should never have forgiven you.

MADAME CLAUDE.

I wanted to have a little talk with your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, but I hope we shall have many little talks. Have you brought your motor down?

MADAME CLAUDE.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

That's charming. You shall take me for a drive in it every day. I hope you're going to stay some time.

MADAME CLAUDE.

That depends on circumstances, Lady Frederick. I 'ave a little business to do here.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then let me give you one warning—don't gamble.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Oh, no, my lady. I gamble quite enough in my business as it is. I never know when my customers will pay their bills—if ever.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Slightly taken aback.*] Ha, ha, ha.

FOULDES.

[*With a deep guffaw.*] Ho, ho, ho.

LADY FREDERICK.

Isn't she clever? I must tell that to the Archduchess. She'll be so amused. Ha, ha, ha, ha. The dear Archduchess, you know she loves a little joke. You must really meet her. Will you come and lunch? I know you'd hit it off together.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*More genially.*] That's very kind of your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear, you know perfectly well that I've always looked upon you as one of my best friends. Now who shall we have? There's you and me and the Archduchess. Then I'll ask Lord Mereston.

MADAME CLAUDE.

The Marquess of Mereston, Lady Frederick?

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes. And Mr. Fouldes, his uncle.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Excuse me, are you the Mr. Paradine Fouldes?

FOULDES.

[*Bowing.*] At your service, madam.

MADAME CLAUDE.

I'm so glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Foulides. [*Unctuously.*] I've always heard you're such a bad man.

FOULDES.

Madam, you overwhelm me with confusion.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Believe me, Mr. Foulides, it's not the ladies that are married to saints who take the trouble to dress well.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now we want a third man. Shall we ask my brother—you know Sir Gerald O'Mara, don't you? Or shall we ask Prince Doniani? Yes, I think we'll ask the Prince. I'm sure you'd like him. Such a handsome man! That'll make six.

MADAME CLAUDE.

It's very kind of you, Lady Frederick, but—well, I'm only a tradeswoman, you know.

LADY FREDERICK.

A tradeswoman? How can you talk such nonsense. You are an artist—a real artist, my dear. And an artist is fit to meet a king.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Well, I don't deny that I'd be ashamed to dress my customers in the gowns I see painted at the Royal Academy.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then it's quite settled, isn't it, Madame Claude—oh, may I call you Ada?

MADAME CLAUDE.

Oh, Lady Frederick, I should be very much flattered. But how did you know that was my name?

LADY FREDERICK.

Why you wrote me a letter only the other day.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Did I?

LADY FREDERICK.

And such a cross letter too.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Apologetically.*] Oh, but Lady Frederick, that was only in the way of business. I don't exactly remember what expressions I may have made use of——

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Interrupting, as if the truth had suddenly flashed across her.*] Ada! I do believe you came here to-day about my account.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Oh, no, my lady, I promise you.

LADY FREDERICK.

You did; I know you did. I see it in your face Now that really wasn't nice of you. I thought you came as a friend.

MADAME CLAUDE.

I did, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK.

No, you wanted to dun me. I'm disappointed in you. I did think, after all the things I've had from you, you wouldn't treat me like that.

MADAME CLAUDE.

But I assure your ladyship. . . .

LADY FREDERICK.

Not another word. You came to ask for a cheque. You shall have it.

MADAME CLAUDE.

No, Lady Frederick, I wouldn't take it.

LADY FREDERICK.

What is the exact figure, Madame Claude?

MADAME CLAUDE.

I—I don't remember.

LADY FREDERICK.

Seven hundred and fifty pounds, seventeen and ninepence. You see, I remember. You came for your cheque and you shall have it.

[*She sits down and takes a pen.*

MADAME CLAUDE.

Now, Lady Frederick, I should look upon that as most unkind. It's treating me like a very second-rate establishment.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm sorry, but you should have thought of that before. Now I haven't got a cheque; how tiresome.

MADAME CLAUDE.

Oh, it doesn't matter, Lady Frederick. I promise you it never entered my 'ead.

LADY FREDERICK.

What shall I do?

FOULDES.

You can write it on a sheet of paper, you know.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a look, aside to him.*] Monster! [*Aloud.*] Of course I can. I hadn't thought of that. [*She takes a sheet of paper.*] But how on earth am I to get a stamp?

FOULDES.

[*Much amused.*] I happen to have one on me.

LADY FREDERICK.

I wonder why on earth you should have English stamps in Monte Carlo?

FOULDES.

[*Handing her one.*] A penny stamp may sometimes save one a hundred louis.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Ironically.*] Thanks so much. I write the name of my bank on the top, don't I? Pay Madame Claude. . . .

MADAME CLAUDE.

Now, it's no good, Lady Frederick, I won't take it. After all I 'ave my self-respect to think of.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's too late now.

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Sniffing a little.*] No, no, Lady Frederick. Don't be too 'ard on me. As one lady to another I ask you to forgive me. I did come about my account, but—well, I don't want the money.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Looking up good-humouredly.*] Well, well. [*She looks at the cheque.*] It shall be as you wish. There. [*She tears it up.*]

MADAME CLAUDE.

Oh, thank you, Lady Frederick. I look upon that as a real favour. And now I really must be getting off.

LADY FREDERICK.

Must you go? Well, good-bye. Paradine, take Madame Claude to her motor. Ada!

[*She kisses her on the cheek.*

MADAME CLAUDE.

[*Going.*] I am pleased to have seen you.

[PARADINE *offers his arm and goes out with* MADAME CLAUDE. LADY FREDERICK *goes to the window, stands on a chair and waves her handkerchief. While she is doing this* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *enters.*

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

How d'you do?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Getting down.*] How nice of you to come. I wanted to see you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

May I sit down?

LADY FREDERICK.

Of course. There are one or two things I'd like to talk to you about.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Yes?

LADY FREDERICK.

First I must thank you for your great kindness to Gerald. I didn't know last night that he owed you a good deal of money.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

It's a mere trifle.

LADY FREDERICK.

You must be very rich to call nine hundred pounds that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I am.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a laugh.*] All the same it's extremely good of you to give him plenty of time.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I told Gerald he could have till to-morrow.

LADY FREDERICK.

Obviously he wants to settle with you as soon as ever he can.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Quietly.*] I often wonder why gambling debts are known as debts of honour.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Looking at him steadily.*] Of course I realise that if you choose to press for the money and Gerald can't pay—he'll have to send in his papers.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Lightly.*] You may be quite sure I have no wish to bring about such a calamity. By the way, have you thought over our little talk of last night?

LADY FREDERICK.

No.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

You would have been wise to do so.

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear Captain Montgomerie, you really can't expect me to marry you because my brother has been so foolish as to lose more money at poker than he can afford.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Did you ever hear that my father was a money-lender?

LADY FREDERICK.

A lucrative profession, I believe.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

He found it so. He was a Polish Jew called Aaron Levitzki. He came to this country with three shillings in his pocket. He lent half-a-crown of it

to a friend on the condition that he should be paid back seven and six in three days.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm not good at figures, but the interest sounds rather high.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

It is. That was one of my father's specialities. From these humble beginnings his business grew to such proportions that at his death he was able to leave me the name and arms of the great family of Montgomerie and something over a million of money.

LADY FREDERICK.

The result of thrift, industry, and good fortune.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

My father was able to gratify all his ambitions but one. He was eaten up with the desire to move in good society, and this he was never able to achieve. His dying wish was that I should live in those circles which he knew only. . . .

LADY FREDERICK.

Across the counter?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Precisely. But my poor father was a little ignorant in these matters. To him one lord was as good as another. He thought a Marquess a finer man than an Earl, and a Viscount than a Baron. He would never

have understood that a penniless Irish baronet might go into better society than many a belted earl.

LADY FREDERICK.

And what is the application of this?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I wanted to explain to you one of the reasons which emboldened me last night to make you a proposal of marriage.

LADY FREDERICK.

But surely you know some very nice people. I saw you lunching the other day with the widow of a city knight.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Many very excellent persons are glad to have me to dine with them. But I know quite well that they're not the real article. I'm as far off as ever from getting into those houses which you have been used to all your life. I'm not content with third-rate earls and rather seedy dowagers.

LADY FREDERICK.

Forgive my frankness, but—aren't you rather a snob?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

My father, Aaron Levitzki, married an English woman, and I have all the English virtues.

LADY FREDERICK.

But I'm not quite sure that people would swallow you even as my husband.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

They'd make a face, but they'd swallow me right enough. And when I asked them down to the best shoot in England they'd come to the conclusion that I agreed with them very well.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Still rather amused.*] Your offer is eminently businesslike, but you see I'm not a business woman. It doesn't appeal to me.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I only ask you to perform such of the duties of a wife as are required by Society. They are few enough in all conscience. I should wish you to entertain largely and receive my guests, be polite to me, at least in public, and go with me to the various places people go to. Otherwise I leave you entire freedom. You will find me generous and heedful to all your wishes.

LADY FREDERICK.

Captain Montgomerie, I don't know how much of all that you have said is meant seriously. But, surely you're not choosing the right time to make such a proposal when my brother owes you so much money that if you care to be hard you can ruin him.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Why not?

LADY FREDERICK.

D'you mean to say. . . . ?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I will be quite frank with you. I should never have allowed Gerald to lose so much money which there was no likelihood of his being able to pay, if I had not thought it earned me some claim upon your gratitude.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Shortly.*] Gerald will pay every penny he owes you to-morrow.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Blandly.*] Where d'you suppose he'll get it?

LADY FREDERICK.

I have no doubt I shall be able to manage something.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Have you not tried this morning, entirely without success?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Startled.*] What?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

You do not forget that you have sundry moneys of your own which are payable to-morrow?

LADY FREDERICK.

How d'you know that?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I told you that when I took a thing in hand I carried it through. You went to Dick Cohen, and he told you he'd parted with the bills. Didn't you guess that only one man could have the least interest in taking them over?

LADY FREDERICK.

You?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, God.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Come, come, don't be worried over it. There's nothing to be alarmed about. I'm a very decent chap—if you'd accepted me right away you would never have known that those bills were in my possession. Think it over once more. I'm sure we should get on well together. I can give you what you most need, money and the liberty to fling it away as recklessly as you choose; you can give me the assured and fixed position on which—my father's heart was set.

LADY FREDERICK.

And if I don't accept, you'll make me a bankrupt and you'll ruin Gerald?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I refuse to consider that very unpleasant alternative.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh! I can't, I can't.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Laughing.*] But you must, you must. When shall I come for your answer? To-morrow? I'll come with the bills and Gerald's I.O.U. in my pocket, and you shall burn them yourself. Good-bye.

[*He kisses her hand and goes out.* LADY FREDERICK *remains staring in front of her.* MERESTON *enters, followed by* LADY MERESTON *and* PARADINE.

MERESTON.

[*Going to her eagerly.*] Hulloa! I wondered what on earth had become of you.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a laugh.*] It's only two hours since I chased you away from me.

MERESTON.

I'm afraid I bore you to death.

LADY FREDERICK.

Don't be so silly. You know you don't.

MERESTON.

Where are you going now?

LADY FREDERICK.

I have rather a headache. I'm going to lie down.

MERESTON.

I'm so sorry.

[LADY FREDERICK *goes out.* MERESTON *stares after her anxiously, and makes a step towards the door.*

LADY MERESTON.

[*Sharply.*] Where are going, Charlie?

MERESTON.

I never asked Lady Frederick if I could do anything.

LADY MERESTON.

Good heavens, there are surely plenty of servants in the hotel to get her anything she wants.

MERESTON.

Don't you think a drive in the motor would do her good?

LADY MERESTON.

[*Unable to control herself.*] Oh, I have no patience with you. I never saw such a ridiculous infatuation in my life.

PARADINE.

Steady, old girl, steady.

MERESTON.

What on earth d'you mean, mother?

LADY MERESTON.

Presumably you're not going to deny that you're in love with that woman.

MERESTON.

[*Growing pale.*] Would you mind speaking of her as Lady Frederick?

LADY MERESTON.

You try me very much, Charlie. Please answer my question.

MERESTON.

I don't want to seem unkind to you, mother, but I think you have no right to ask about my private affairs.

FOULDES.

If you're going to talk this matter over you're more likely to come to an understanding if you both keep your tempers.

MERESTON.

There's nothing I wish to discuss.

LADY MERESTON.

Don't be absurd, Charlie. You're with Lady Frederick morning, noon and night. She can never stir a yard from the hotel but you go flying after. You pester her with your ridiculous attentions.

FOULDES.

[*Blandly.*] One's relations have always such an engaging frankness. Like a bad looking-glass, they

always represent you with a crooked nose and a cast in your eye.

LADY MERESTON.

[*To* MERESTON.] I have certainly a right to know what you mean by all this and what is going to come of it.

MERESTON.

I don't know what will come of it.

FOULDES.

The question that excites our curiosity is this: are you going to ask Lady Frederick to marry you?

MERESTON.

I refuse to answer that. It seems to me excessively impertinent.

FOULDES.

Come, come, my boy, you're too young to play the heavy father. We're both your friends. Hadn't you better make a clean breast of it? After all, your mother and I are interested in nothing so much as your welfare.

LADY MERESTON.

[*Imploring.*] Charlie!

MERESTON.

Of course I'd ask her to marry me if I thought for a moment that she'd accept. But I'm so terrified that she'll refuse, and then perhaps I shall never see her again.

LADY MERESTON.

The boy's stark, staring mad.

MERESTON.

I don't know what I should do if she sent me about my business. I'd rather continue in this awful uncertainty than lose all hope for ever.

FOULDES.

By George. You're pretty far gone, my son. The lover who's diffident is in a much worse way than the lover who protests.

LADY MERESTON.

[*With a little laugh.*] I must say it amuses me that Lady Frederick should have had both my brother and my son dangling at her skirts. Your respective passions are separated by quite a number of years.

MERESTON.

Lady Frederick has already told me of that incident.

FOULDES.

With the usual indiscretion of her sex.

MERESTON.

It appears that she was very unhappy and you, with questionable taste, made love to her.

FOULDES.

Do your best not to preach at me, dear boy. It reminds me of your lamented father.

MERESTON.

And at last she promised to go away with you You were to meet at Waterloo Station.

FOULDES.

Such a draughty place for an assignation.

MERESTON.

Your train was to start at nine, and you were going to take the boat over to the Channel Isles.

FOULDES.

Lady Frederick has a very remarkable memory. I remember hoping the sea wouldn't be rough.

MERESTON.

And just as the train was starting her eye fell on the clock. At that moment her child was coming down to breakfast and would ask for her. Before you could stop her she'd jumped out of the carriage. The train was moving, and you couldn't get out, so you were taken on to Weymouth—alone.

LADY MERESTON.

You must have felt a quite egregious ass, Paradine.

FOULDES.

I did, but you need not rub it in.

LADY MERESTON.

Doesn't it occur to you, Charlie, that a woman who loves so easily can't be very worthy of your affection?

MERESTON.

But, my dear mother, d'you think she cared for my uncle?

FOULDES.

What the dickens d'you mean?

MERESTON.

D'you suppose if she loved you she would have hesitated to come? D'you know her so little as that? She thought of her child only because she was quite indifferent to you.

FOULDES.

[*Crossly.*] You know nothing about it, and you're an impertinent young jackanapes.

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Paradine, what can it matter if Lady Frederick was in love with you or not?

FOULDES.

[*Calming down.*] Of course it doesn't matter a bit.

LADY MERESTON.

I have no doubt you mistook wounded vanity for a broken heart.

FOULDES.

[*Acidly.*] My dear, you sometimes say things which explain to me why my brother-in-law so frequently abandoned his own fireside for the platform of Exeter Hall.

MERESTON.

It may also interest you to learn that I am perfectly aware of Lady Frederick's financial difficulties. I know she has two bills falling due to-morrow.

FOULDES.

She's a very clever woman.

MERESTON.

I've implored her to let me lend her the money, and she absolutely refuses. You see, she's kept nothing from me at all.

LADY MERESTON.

My dear Charlie, it's a very old dodge to confess what doesn't matter in order to conceal what does.

MERESTON.

What do you mean, mother?

LADY MERESTON.

Lady Frederick has told you nothing of the Bellingham affair?

MERESTON.

Why should she?

LADY MERESTON.

It is surely expedient you should know that the woman you have some idea of marrying escaped the divorce court only by the skin of her teeth.

MERESTON.

I don't believe that, mother.

FOULDES.

Remember that you're talking to your respected parent, my boy.

MERESTON.

I'm sorry that my mother should utter base and contemptible libels on—my greatest friend.

LADY MERESTON.

You may be quite sure that I say nothing which I can't prove.

MERESTON.

I won't listen to anything against Lady Frederick.

LADY MERESTON.

But you must.

MERESTON.

Are you quite indifferent to the great pain you cause me?

LADY MERESTON.

I can't allow you to marry a woman who's hopelessly immoral.

MERESTON.

Mother, how dare you say that?

FOULDES.

This isn't the sort of thing I much like, but hadn't you better hear the worst at once?

MERESTON.

Very well. But if my mother insists on saying things, she must say them in Lady Frederick's presence.

LADY MERESTON.

That I'm quite willing to do.

MERESTON.

Good.

[*He rings the bell. A servant enters.*

FOULDES.

You'd better take care, Maudie. Lady Frederick's a dangerous woman to play the fool with.

MERESTON.

[*To the servant.*] Go to Lady Frederick Berolles and say Lord Mereston is extremely sorry to trouble her ladyship, but would be very much obliged if she'd come to the drawing-room for two minutes.

SERVANT.

Very well, my lord.

[*Exit*

FOULDES.

What are you going to do, Maud?

LADY MERESTON.

I knew there was a letter in existence in Lady Frederick's handwriting which proved all I've said about her. I've moved heaven and earth to get hold of it, and it came this morning.

FOULDES.

Don't be such a fool. You're not going to use that?

LADY MERESTON.

I am indeed

FOULDES.

Your blood be upon your own head. Unless I'm vastly mistaken you'll suffer the greatest humiliation that you can imagine.

LADY MERESTON.

That's absurd. I have nothing to fear.

LADY FREDERICK *comes in.*

MERESTON

I'm so sorry to disturb you. I hope you don't mind?

LADY FREDERICK

Not at all. I knew you wouldn't have sent for me in that fashion without good cause.

MERESTON.

I'm afraid you'll think me dreadfully impertinent.

LADY MERESTON.

Really you need not apologise so much, Charlie.

MERESTON.

My mother has something to say against you, and I think it right that she should say it in your presence.

LADY FREDERICK.

That's very nice of you, Charlie—though I confess I prefer people to say horrid things of me only behind my back. Especially if they're true.

FOULDES.

Look here, I think all this is rather nonsense. We've most of us got something in our past history that we don't want raked up, and we'd all better let bygones be bygones.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm waiting, Lady Mereston

LADY MERESTON.

It's merely that I thought my son should know that Lady Frederick had been the mistress of Roger Bellingham. [LADY FREDERICK *turns quickly and looks at her; then bursts into a peal of laughter.* LADY MERESTON *springs up angrily and hands her a letter.*] Is this in your handwriting?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Not at all disconcerted.*] Dear me, how did you get hold of this?

LADY MERESTON.

You see that I have ample proof, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Handing the letter to* MERESTON.] Would you like to read it? You know my writing well enough to be able to answer Lady Mereston's question.

[*He reads it through and looks at her in dismay.*

MERESTON.

Good God! . . . What does it mean?

LADY FREDERICK.

Pray read it aloud.

MERESTON.

I can't.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then give it to me. [*She takes it from him.*] It's addressed to my brother-in-law, Peter Berolles. The Kate to whom it refers was his wife. [*Reads.*] Dear Peter: I'm sorry you should have had a row with Kate about Roger Bellingham. You are quite wrong in all you thought. There is absolutely nothing between them. I don't know where Kate was on Tuesday night, but certainly she was not within a hundred miles of Roger. This I know because. . . .

MERESTON.

[*Interrupting.*] For God's sake don't go on.

[LADY FREDERICK *looks at him and shrugs her shoulders.*

LADY FREDERICK.

It's signed Elizabeth Berolles. And there's a post-script: You may make what use of this letter you like.

MERESTON.

What does it mean? What does it mean

LADY MERESTON.

Surely it's very clear? You can't want a more explicit confession of guilt.

LADY FREDERICK.

I tried to make it as explicit as possible.

MERESTON.

Won't you say something? I'm sure there must be some explanation.

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know how you got hold of this letter, Lady Mereston. I agree with you, it is compromising. But Kate and Peter are dead now, and there's nothing to prevent me from telling the truth.

[PARADINE FOULDES *takes a step forward and watches her.*

LADY FREDERICK.

My sister-in-law was a meek and mild little person, as demure as you can imagine, and no one would have suspected her for a moment of kicking over the traces. Well, one morning she came to me in floods of tears and confessed that she and Roger Bellingham [*with a shrug*] had been foolish. Her husband suspected that something was wrong and had kicked up a row.

FOULDES.

[*Drily.*] There are men who will make a scene on the smallest provocation.

LADY FREDERICK.

To shield herself she told the first lie that came into her head. She said to Peter that Roger Bellingham was my lover—and she threw herself on my mercy. She was a poor, weak little creature, and if there'd been a scandal she'd have gone to the dogs altogether. It had only been a momentary infatuation for Roger, and the scare had cured her. At the bottom of her heart she loved her husband still. I was desperately unhappy, and I didn't care much what became of me. She promised to turn over a new leaf and all that sort of thing. I thought I'd better give her another chance of going straight. I did what she wanted. I wrote that letter taking all the blame on myself, and Kate lived happily with her husband till she died.

MERESTON.

It was just like you.

LADY MERESTON.

But Lord and Lady Peter are dead?

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes.

LADY MERESTON.

And Roger Bellingham?

LADY FREDERICK.

He's dead too.

LADY MERESTON.

Then how can you prove your account of this affair?

LADY FREDERICK.

I can't.

LADY MERESTON.

And does this convince you, Charlie?

MERESTON.

Of course.

LADY MERESTON.

[*Impatiently.*] Good heavens, the boy's out of his senses. Paradine, for Heaven's sake say something.

FOULDES.

Well, much as it may displease you, my dear, I'm afraid I agree with Charlie.

LADY MERESTON.

You don't mean to say you believe this cock-and-bull story?

FOULDES.

I do

LADY MERESTON.

Why?

FOULDES.

Well, you see, Lady Frederick's a very clever woman. She would never have invented such an utterly improbable tale, which can't possibly be proved. If she'd been guilty, she'd have had ready at least a dozen proofs of her innocence.

LADY MERESTON.

But that's absurd.

FOULDES.

Besides, I've known Lady Frederick a long time, and she has at least a thousand faults.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With flashing eyes.*] Thanks.

FOULDES.

But there's something I will say for her. She's not a liar. If she tells me a thing, I don't hesitate for a moment to believe it.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's not a matter of the smallest importance if any of you believe me or not. Be so good as to ring, Charlie.

MERESTON.

Certainly.

[*He rings, and a* SERVANT *immediately comes in.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Tell my servant that he's to come here at once and bring the despatch-box which is in my dressing-room.

SERVANT.

Yes, miladi. [*Exit.*

FOULDES.

[*Quickly.*] I say, what are you going to do?

LADY FREDERICK.

That is absolutely no business of yours.

FOULDES.

Be a brick, Betsy, and don't give her those letters.

LADY FREDERICK.

I think I've had enough of this business. I'm proposing to finish with it.

FOULDES.

Temper, temper.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Stamping her foot.*] Don't say temper to me, Paradine.

[*She walks up and down angrily.* PARADINE *sits at the piano and with one finger strums "Rule Britannia."*

MERESTON.

Shut up.

[*He takes a book, flings it at his head and misses.*

FOULDES.

Good shot, sir.

LADY FREDERICK.

I often wonder how you got your reputation for wit, Paradine.

FOULDES.

By making a point of laughing heartily at other people's jokes.

[*The* FOOTMAN *enters with the despatch-box, which* LADY FREDERICK *opens. She takes a bundle of letters from it.*

FOULDES.

Betsy, Betsy, for heaven's sake don't! Have mercy.

LADY FREDERICK.

Was mercy shown to me? Albert!

FOOTMAN.

Yes, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK.

You'll go to the proprietor of the hotel and tell him that I propose to leave Monte Carlo to-morrow.

MERESTON.

[*Aghast.*] Are you going?

FOOTMAN.

Very well, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK.

Have you a good memory for faces?

FOOTMAN.

Yes, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're not likely to forget Lord Mereston?

FOOTMAN.

No, my lady.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then please take note that if his lordship calls upon me in London I'm not at home.

MERESTON.

Lady Frederick!

LADY FREDERICK.

[*To* FOOTMAN.] Go.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

MERESTON.

What d'you mean? What have I done?

[*Without answering* LADY FREDERICK *takes the letters.* PARADINE *is watching her anxiously. She goes up to the stove and throws them in one by one.*

LADY MERESTON.

What on earth is she doing?

LADY FREDERICK.

I have some letters here which would ruin the happiness of a very worthless woman I know. I'm burning them so that I may never have the temptation to use them.

FOULDES.

I never saw anything so melodramatic.

LADY FREDERICK.

Hold your tongue, Paradine. [*Turning to* MERESTON.] My dear Charlie, I came to Monte Carlo to be amused. Your mother has persecuted me incessantly. Your uncle—is too well-bred to talk to his servants as he has talked to me. I've been pestered in one way and another, and insulted till my blood boiled, because apparently they're afraid you may want to marry me. I'm sick and tired of it. I'm not used to treatment of this sort; my patience is quite exhausted. And since you are the cause of the whole thing I have an obvious remedy. I would much rather not have anything more to do with you. If we meet one another in the street you need not trouble to look my way because I shall cut you dead.

LADY MERESTON.

[*In an undertone.*] Thank God for that.

MERESTON.

Mother, mother. [*To* LADY FREDERICK.] I'm awfully sorry. I feel that you have a right to be angry. For all that you've suffered I beg your pardon most humbly. My mother has said and done things which I regret to say are quite unjustifiable.

LADY MERESTON.

Charlie!

MERESTON.

On her behalf and on mine I apologise with all my heart.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Smiling.*] Don't take it too seriously. It really doesn't matter. But I think it's far wiser that we shouldn't see one another again.

MERESTON.

But I can't live without you.

LADY MERESTO

[*With a gasp.*] Ah!

MERESTON.

Don't you know that my whole happiness is wrapped up in you? I love you with all my heart and soul. I can never love any one but you.

FOULDES.

[*To* LADY MERESTON.] Now you've done it. You've done it very neatly.

MERESTON.

Don't think me a presumptuous fool. I've been wanting to say this ever since I knew you, but I haven't dared. You're brilliant and charming and fascinating, but I have nothing whatever to offer you.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Gently.*] My dear Charlie.

MERESTON.

But if you can overlook my faults, I daresay you could make something of me. Won't you marry me? I should look upon it as a great honour, and I would love you always to the end of my life. I'd try to be worthy of my great happiness and you.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're very much too modest, Charlie. I'm enormously flattered and grateful. You must give me time to think it over.

LADY MERESTON.

Time?

MERESTON.

But I can't wait. Don't you see how I love you? You'll never meet any one who'll care for you as I do.

LADY FREDERICK.

I think you can wait a little. Come and see me to-morrow morning at ten, and I'll give you an answer.

MERESTON.

Very well, if I must.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Smiling.*] I'm afraid so.

FOULDES.

[*To* LADY FREDERICK.] I wonder what the deuce your little game is now.

[*She smiles triumphantly and gives him a deep, ironical curtsey.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Sir, your much obliged and very obedient, humble servant

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THIRD ACT

SCENE: LADY FREDERICK'S *dressing-room. At the back is a large opening, curtained, which leads to the bedroom; on the right a door leading to the passage; on the left a window. In front of the window, of which the blind is drawn, is a dressing-table.* LADY FREDERICK'S *maid is in the room, a very neat pretty Frenchwoman. She speaks with a slight accent. She rings the bell, and the* FOOTMAN *enters.*

MAID.

As soon as Lord Mereston arrives he is to be shown in.

FOOTMAN.

[*Surprised.*] Here?

MAID.

Where else?

[*The* FOOTMAN *winks significantly. The* MAID *draws herself up with dignity, and with a dramatic gesture points to the door.*

MAID.

Depart.

[*The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*From the bedroom.*] Have you drawn the blind, Angélique?

MAID.

I will do so, miladi. [*She draws the blind, and the light falls brightly on the dressing-table.*] But miladi will never be able to stand it. [*She looks at herself in the glass.*] Oh, the light of the sun in the morning! I cannot look at myself.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*As before.*] There's no reason that you should—especially in my glass.

MAID.

But if 'is lordship is coming, miladi must let me draw the blind. Oh, it is impossible.

LADY FREDERICK.

Do as you're told and don't interfere.

[*The* FOOTMAN *enters to announce* MERESTON. *The* MAID *goes out.*

FOOTMAN.

Lord Mereston.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*As before.*] Is that you, Charlie? You're very punctual.

MERESTON.

I've been walking about outside till the clock struck.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm not nearly dressed, you know. I've only just had my bath.

MERESTON.

Must I go?

LADY FREDERICK.

No, of course not. You can talk to me while I'm finishing.

MERESTON.

All right. How are you this morning?

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know. I haven't looked at myself in the glass yet. How are you?

MERESTON.

A 1, thanks.

LADY FREDERICK.

Are you looking nice?

MERESTON.

[*Going to the glass.*] I hope so. By Jove, what a strong light. You must be pretty sure of your complexion to be able to stand that.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Appearing.*] I am.

MERESTON.

[*Going forward eagerly.*] Ah,

[*She comes through the curtains. She wears a kimono, her hair is all dishevelled, hanging about her head in a tangled mop. She is not made up and looks haggard and yellow and lined. When* MERESTON *sees her he gives a slight start of surprise. She plays the scene throughout with her broadest brogue.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Good-morning.

MERESTON.

[*Staring at her in dismay.*] Good-morning.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, what have you to say to me?

MERESTON.

[*Embarrassed.*] I—er—hope you slept all right

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Did you?

MERESTON.

I forget.

LADY FREDERICK.

I believe you slept like a top, Charlie. You really might have lain awake and thought of me. What is the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.

MERESTON.

Oh no, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're not disappointed already?

MERESTON.

No, of course not. Only—you look so different with your hair not done.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a little cry.*] Oh, I'd forgotten all about it. Angélique, come and do my hair.

MAID.

[*Appearing.*] Yes, miladi.

[LADY FREDERICK *sits down at the dressing-table.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Now, take pains, Angélique. I want to look my very best. Angélique is a jewel of incalculable value.

MAID.

Miladi is very kind.

LADY FREDERICK.

If I'm light-hearted, she does it one way. If I'm depressed she does it another.

MAID.

Oh, miladi, the perruquier who taught me said always that a good hairdresser could express every mood and every passion of the human heart.

LADY FREDERICK.

Good heavens, you don't mean to say you can do all that?

MAID.

Miladi, he said I was his best pupil.

LADY FREDERICK.

Very well. Express—express a great crisis in my affairs.

MAID.

That is the easiest thing in the world, miladi. I bring the hair rather low on the forehead, and that expresses a crisis in her ladyship's affairs.

LADY FREDERICK.

But I always wear my hair low on the forehead.

MAID.

Then it is plain her ladyship's affairs are always in a critical condition.

LADY FREDERICK.

So they are. I never thought of that.

MERESTON.

You've got awfully stunning hair, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK.

D'you like it, really?

MERESTON.

The colour's perfectly beautiful.

LADY FREDERICK.

It ought to be. It's frightfully expensive.

MERESTON.

You don't mean to say it's dyed?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, no. Only touched up. That's quite a different thing.

MERESTON.

Is it?

LADY FREDERICK.

It's like superstition, you know, which is what other people believe. My friends dye their hair, but I only touch mine up. Unfortunately, it costs just as much.

MERESTON.

And you have such a lot.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, heaps. [*She opens a drawer and takes out a long switch.*] Give him a bit to look at.

MAID.

Yes, miladi. [*She gives it to him.*

MERESTON.

Er—yes. [*Not knowing what on earth to say.*] How silky it is.

LADY FREDERICK.

A poor thing, but mine own. At least, I paid for it. By the way, have I paid for it yet, Angélique?

MAID.

Not yet, miladi. But the man can wait.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Taking it from* MERESTON.] A poor thing, then, but my hairdresser's. Shall I put it on?

MERESTON.

I wouldn't, if I were you.

MAID.

If her ladyship anticipates a tragic situation, I would venture to recommend it. A really pathetic scene is impossible without a quantity of hair worn quite high on the head.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, I know. Whenever I want to soften the hard heart of a creditor I clap on every bit I've got. But I don't think I will to-day. I'll tell you what, a temple curl would just fit the case.

MAID.

Then her ladyship inclines to comedy. Very well, I say no more.

[LADY FREDERICK *takes two temple-curls from the drawer.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Aren't they dears?

MERESTON.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

You've admired them very often, Charlie, haven't you? I suppose you never knew they cost a guinea each?

MERESTON.

It never occurred to me they were false.

LADY FREDERICK.

The masculine intelligence is so gross. Didn't your mother tell you?

MERESTON.

My mother told me a great deal.

LADY FREDERICK.

I expect she overdid it. There. Now that's done. D'you think it looks nice?

MERESTON.

Charming.

LADY FREDERICK.

Angélique, his lordship is satisfied. You may disappear.

MAID.

Yes, miladi. [*She goes.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Now, tell me you think I'm the most ravishing creature you ever saw in your life.

MERESTON.

I've told you that so often.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Stretching out her hands.*] You are a nice boy. It was charming of you to say—what you did yesterday. I could have hugged you there and then.

MERESTON.

Could you?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my dear, don't be so cold

MERESTON.

I'm very sorry, I didn't mean to be.

LADY FREDERICK.

Haven't you got anything nice to say to me at all?

MERESTON.

I don't know what I can say that I've not said a thousand times already.

LADY FREDERICK.

Tell me what you thought of all night when you tossed on that sleepless pillow of yours.

MERESTON.

I was awfully anxious to see you again.

LADY FREDERICK.

Didn't you have a dreadful fear that I shouldn't be as nice as you imagined? Now, come—honestly.

MERESTON.

Well, yes, I suppose it crossed my mind.

LADY FREDERICK.

And am I?

MERESTON.

Of course.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're sure you're not disappointed?

MERESTON.

Quite sure.

LADY FREDERICK.

What a relief! You know, I've been tormenting myself dreadfully. I said to myself: "He'll go on thinking of me till he imagines I'm the most beautiful woman in the world, and then, when he comes here and sees the plain reality, it'll be an awful blow.

MERESTON.

What nonsense! How could you think anything of the kind?

LADY FREDERICK.

Are you aware that you haven't shown the least desire to kiss me yet?

MERESTON.

I thought—I thought you might not like it.

LADY FREDERICK.

It'll be too late in a minute.

MERESTON.

Why?

LADY FREDERICK.

Because I'm just going to make up, you silly boy.

MERESTON.

How? I don't understand.

LADY FREDERICK.

You said I must be very sure of my complexion Of course I am. Here it is.

[*She runs her fingers over a row of little pots and vases.*

MERESTON.

Oh, I see. I beg your pardon.

LADY FREDERICK.

You don't mean to say you thought it natural?

MERESTON.

It never occurred to me it might be anything else

LADY FREDERICK.

It's really too disheartening. I spend an hour every day of my life making the best complexion in Monte Carlo, and you think it's natural. Why, I might as well be a dairymaid of eighteen.

MERESTON.

I'm very sorry.

LADY FREDERICK.

I forgive you. . . . You may kiss my hand. [*He does so.*] You dear boy. [*Looking at herself in the glass.*] Oh, Betsy, you're not looking your best to-day. [*Shaking her finger at the glass.*] This won't do, Betsy, my dear. You're very nearly looking your age. [*Turning round quickly.*] D'you think I look forty?

MERESTON.

I never asked myself how old you were.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, I'm not, you know. And I shan't be as long as there's a pot of rouge and a powder puff in the world. [*She rubs grease paint all over her face.*]

MERESTON.

What *are* you doing?

LADY FREDERICK.

I wish I were an actress. They have such an advantage. They only have to make up to look well behind the footlights; but I have to expose myself to that beastly sun.

MERESTON.

[*Nervously.*] Yes, of course.

LADY FREDERICK.

Is your mother dreadfully annoyed with you? And Paradine must be furious. I shall call him Uncle Paradine next time I see him. It'll make him feel so middle-aged. Charlie, you don't know how grateful I am for what you did yesterday. You acted like a real brick.

MERESTON.

It's awfully good of you to say so.

LADY FREDERICK,

[*Turning.*] Do I look a fright?

MERESTON.

Oh, no, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK.

I love this powder. It plays no tricks with you. Once I put on a new powder that I bought in Paris, and as soon as I went into artificial light it turned a bright

mauve. I was very much annoyed. You wouldn't like to go about with a mauve face, would you?

MERESTON.

No, not at all.

LADY FREDERICK.

Fortunately I had a green frock on. And mauve and green were very fashionable that year. Still I'd sooner it hadn't been on my face. . . . There. I think that'll do as a foundation. I'm beginning to feel younger already. Now for the delicate soft bloom of youth. The great difficulty, you know, is to make both your cheeks the same colour. [*Turning to him.*] Charlie, you're not bored, are you?

MERESTON.

No, no.

LADY FREDERICK.

I always think my observations have a peculiar piquancy when I have only one cheek rouged. I remember once I went out to dinner, and as soon as I sat down I grew conscious of the fact that one of my cheeks was much redder than the other.

MERESTON.

By George, that was awkward.

LADY FREDERICK.

Charlie, you are a good-looking boy. I had no idea you were so handsome. And you look so young and fresh, it's quite a pleasure to look at you.

MERESTON.

[*Laughing awkwardly.*] D'you think so? What did you do when you discovered your predicament?

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, by a merciful interposition of Providence, I had a foreign diplomatist on my right side which bloomed like a rose, and a bishop on my left which was white like the lily. The diplomatist told me risky stories all through dinner so it was quite natural that this cheek should blush fiery red. And as the Bishop whispered in my left ear harrowing details of distress in the East End, it was only decent that the other should exhibit a becoming pallor. [*Meanwhile she has been rouging her cheeks.*] Now look carefully, Charlie, and you'll see how I make the Cupid's bow which is my mouth. I like a nice healthy colour on the lips, don't you?

MERESTON.

Isn't it awfully uncomfortable to have all that stuff on?

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, my dear boy, it's woman's lot to suffer in this world. But it's a great comfort to think that one is submitting to the decrees of Providence and at the same time adding to one's personal attractiveness. But I confess I sometimes wish I needn't blow my nose so carefully. Smile, Charlie. I don't think you're a very ardent lover, you know.

MERESTON.

I'm sorry. What would you like me to do?

LADY FREDERICK.

I should like you to make me impassioned speeches.

MERESTON.

I'm afraid they'd be so hackneyed.

LADY FREDERICK.

Never mind that. I've long discovered that under the influence of profound emotion a man always expresses himself in the terms of the *Family Herald.*

MERESTON.

You must remember that I'm awfully inexperienced.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, I'll let you off this time—because I like your curly hair. [*She sighs amorously.*] Now for the delicate arch of my eyebrows. I don't know what I should do without this. I've got no eyebrows at all really. . . . Have you ever noticed that dark line under the eyes which gives such intensity to my expression?

MERESTON.

Yes, often.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Holding out the pencil.*] Well, here it is. Ah, my dear boy, in this pencil you have at will roguishness and languor, tenderness and indifference, sprightli-

ness, passion, malice, what you will. Now be very quiet for one moment. If I overdo it my whole day will be spoilt. You mustn't breathe even. Whenever I do this I think how true those lines are:

"The little more and how much it is.
The little less and what worlds away."

There! Now just one puff of powder, and the whole world's kind. [*Looking at herself in the glass and sighing with satisfaction.*] Ah! I feel eighteen. I think it's a success, and I shall have a happy day. Oh, Betsy, Betsy, I think you'll do. You know, you're not unattractive, my dear. Not strictly beautiful, perhaps; but then I don't like the chocolate-box sort of woman. I'll just go and take off this dressing-gown. [MERESTON *gets up.*] No, don't move. I'll go into my bedroom. I shall only be one moment. [LADY FREDERICK *goes through the curtains.*] Angélique.

[*The* MAID *enters.*

MAID.

Yes, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK.

Just clear away those things on the dressing-table.

MAID.

[*Doing so.*] Very well, miladi.

LADY FREDERICK.

You may have a cigarette, Charlie.

MERESTON.

Thanks. My nerves are a bit dicky this morning.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, blow the thing! Angélique, come and help me.

MAID.

Yes, miladi. [*She goes out.*

LADY FREDERICK.

At last.

[*She comes in, having changed the kimono for a very beautiful dressing-gown of silk and lace.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Now, are you pleased?

MERESTON.

Of course I'm pleased.

LADY FREDERICK

Then you may make love to me.

MERESTON.

You say such disconcerting things.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] Well, Charlie, you've found no difficulty in doing it for the last fortnight. You're not going to pretend that you're already at a loss for pretty speeches?

MERESTON.

When I came here, I had a thousand things to say to you, but you've driven them all out of my head. Won't you give me an answer now?

LADY FREDERICK.

What to?

MERESTON.

You've not forgotten that I asked you to marry me?

LADY FREDERICK.

No, but you asked me under very peculiar circumstances. I wonder if you can repeat the offer now in cold blood?

MERESTON.

Of course. What a cad you must think me!

LADY FREDERICK.

Are you sure you want to marry me still—after having slept over it?

MERESTON.

Yes.

LADY FREDERICK.

You are a good boy, and I'm a beast to treat you so abominably. It's awfully nice of you.

MERESTON.

Well, what is the answer?

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear, I've been giving it you for the last half-hour.

MERESTON.

How?

LADY FREDERICK.

You don't for a moment suppose I should have let you into those horrible mysteries of my toilette if I'd had any intention of marrying you? Give me credit for a certain amount of intelligence and good feeling. I should have kept up the illusion, at all events till after the honeymoon.

MERESTON.

Are you going to refuse me?

LADY FREDERICK.

Aren't you rather glad?

MERESTON.

No, no, no.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Putting her arm through his.*] Now let us talk it over sensibly. You're a very nice boy, and I'm awfully fond of you. But you're twenty-two, and heaven only knows my age. You see, the church in which I was baptized was burnt down the year I was born, so I don't know how old I am.

MERESTON.

[*Smiling.*] Where was it burnt?

LADY FREDERICK.

In Ireland.

MERESTON.

I thought so.

LADY FREDERICK.

Just at present I can make a decent enough show by taking infinite pains; and my hand is not so heavy that the innocent eyes of your sex can discover how much of me is due to art. But in ten years you'll only be thirty-two, and then, if I married you, my whole life would be a mortal struggle to preserve some semblance of youth. Haven't you seen those old hags who've never surrendered to Anno Domini, with their poor, thin, wrinkled cheeks covered with paint, and the dreadful wigs that hide a hairless pate? Rather cock-eyed, don't you know, and invariably flaxen. You've laughed at their ridiculous graces, and you've been disgusted too. Oh, I'm so sorry for them, poor things. And I should become just like that, for I should never have the courage to let my hair be white so long as yours was brown. But if I don't marry you, I can look forward to the white hairs fairly happily. The first I shall pluck out, and the second I shall pluck out. But when the third comes I'll give in, and I'll throw my rouge and my *poudre de riz* and my pencils into the fire.

MERESTON.

But d'you think I should ever change?

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear boy, I'm sure of it. Can't you imagine what it would be to be tied to a woman who was always bound to sit with her back to the light? And sometimes you might want to kiss me.

MERESTON.

I think it very probable.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, you couldn't—in case you disarranged my complexion. [MERESTON *sighs deeply.*] Don't sigh, Charlie. I daresay I was horrid to let you fall in love with me, but I'm only human, and I was desperately flattered.

MERESTON.

Was that all?

LADY FREDERICK.

And rather touched. That is why I want to give a cure with my refusal.

MERESTON.

But you break my heart.

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear, men have said that to me ever since I was fifteen, but I've never noticed that in consequence they ate their dinner less heartily.

MERESTON.

I suppose you think it was only calf-love?

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm not such a fool as to imagine a boy can love any less than a man. If I'd thought your affection ridiculous I shouldn't have been so flattered.

MERESTON.

It doesn't hurt any the less because the wounds you make are clean cut.

LADY FREDERICK.

But they'll soon heal. And you'll fall in love with a nice girl of your own age, whose cheeks flush with youth and not with rouge, and whose eyes sparkle because they love you, and not because they're carefully made up.

MERESTON.

But I wanted to help you. You're in such an awful scrape, and if you'll only marry me it can all be set right.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my dear, don't go in for self-sacrifice. You must leave that to women. They're so much more used to it.

MERESTON.

Isn't there anything I can do for you?

LADY FREDERICK.

No, dear. I shall get out of the mess somehow. I always do. You really need not worry about me.

MERESTON.

You know, you *are* a brick.

LADY FREDERICK.

Then it's all settled, isn't it? And you're not going to be unhappy?

MERESTON.

I'll try not to be.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'd like to imprint a chaste kiss on your forehead, only I'm afraid it would leave a mark.

[*The* FOOTMAN *comes in and announces* PARADINE FOULDES.

FOOTMAN.

Mr. Paradine Fouldes. [*Exit.*

FOULDES.

Do I disturb?

LADY FREDERICK.

Not at all. We've just finished our conversation.

FOULDES.

Well?

MERESTON.

If any one wants to know who the best woman in the world is send 'em to me, and I'll tell them.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Taking his hand.*] You dear! Good-bye.

MERESTON.

Good-bye. And thanks for being so kind to me.

[*He goes out.*

FOULDES.

Do I see in front of me my prospective niece?

LADY FREDERICK.

Why d'you ask, Uncle Paradine?

FOULDES.

Singularly enough because I want to know.

LADY FREDERICK.

Well, it so happens—you don't.

FOULDES.

You've refused him?

LADY FREDERICK.

I have.

FOULDES.

Then will you tell me why you've been leading us all such a devil of a dance?

LADY FREDERICK.

Because you interfered with me, and I allow no one to do that.

FOULDES

Hoity-toity.

LADY FREDERICK.

You weren't really so foolish as to imagine I should marry a boy who set me up on a pedestal and vowed he was unworthy to kiss the hem of my garment?

FOULDES.

Why not?

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear Paradine, I don't want to commit suicide by sheer boredom. There's only one thing in the world more insufferable than being in love.

FOULDES.

And what is that, pray?

LADY FREDERICK.

Why, having some one in love with you.

FOULDES.

I've suffered from it all my life.

LADY FREDERICK.

Think of living up to the ideal Charlie has of me. My hair would turn a hydrogen yellow in a week. And then to be so desperately adored as all that—oh, it's so dull! I should have to wear a mask all day long. I could never venture to be natural in case I shocked him. And notwithstanding all my efforts I should see the illusions tumbling about his ears one by one till he realised I was no ethereal goddess, but a very ordinary human woman neither better nor worse than anybody else.

FOULDES.

Your maxim appears to be, marry any one you like except the man that's in love with you.

LADY FREDERICK.

Ah, but don't you think I might find a man who loved me though he knew me through and through? I'd far rather that he saw my faults and forgave them than that he thought me perfect.

FOULDES.

But how d'you know you've choked the boy off for good?

LADY FREDERICK.

I took good care. I wanted to cure him. If it had been possible I would have shown him my naked soul. But I couldn't do that, so I let him see. . . .

FOULDES.

[*Interrupting.*] What!

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Laughing.*] No, not quite. I had a dressing-gown on and other paraphernalia. But I made him come here when I wasn't made up, and he sat by while I rouged my cheeks.

FOULDES.

And the young fool thought there was nothing more in you than a carefully prepared complexion?

LADY FREDERICK.

He was very nice about it. But I think he was rather relieved when I refused him.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

GERALD.

[*Outside.*] May we come in?

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes do.

Enter GERALD *and* ROSE *and the* ADMIRAL.

GERALD.

[*Excitedly.*] I say, it's all right. The Admiral's come down like a real brick. I've told him everything.

LADY FREDERICK.

What do you mean? Good-morning, dear Admiral.

ADMIRAL.

Good-morning.

GERALD.

I've made a clean breast of it. I talked it over with Rosie.

ROSE.

And we went to papa together.

GERALD.

And told him that I owed Montgomerie nine hundred pounds.

ROSE.

And we thought papa would make an awful scene.

GERALD.

Raise Cain, don't you know.

ROSE.

But he never said a word.

GERALD.

He was simply ripping over it.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Putting her hands to her ears.*] Oh, oh, oh. For heaven's sake be calm and coherent.

GERALD.

My dear, you don't know what a relief it is.

ROSE.

I saw Gerald was dreadfully worried, and I wormed it out of him.

GERALD.

I'm so glad to be out of the clutches of that brute.

ROSE.

Now we're going to live happily ever afterwards.

[*All the while the* ADMIRAL *has been trying to get a word in, but each time he is about to start one of the others has broken in.*

ADMIRAL.

Silence. [*He puffs and blows.*] I never saw such a pair in my life.

LADY FREDERICK.

Now do explain it all, Admiral. I can't make head or tail out of these foolish creatures.

ADMIRAL.

Well, they came and told me that Montgomerie had an I.O.U. of Gerald's for nine hundred pounds and was using it to blackmail you.

FOULDES.

Is that a fact?

LADY FREDERICK.

Yes.

ADMIRAL.

I never liked the man's face. And when they said his terms were that you were to marry him or Gerald would have to send in his papers, I said . . .

FOULDES.

Damn his impudence.

ADMIRAL.

How did you know?

FOULDES.

Because I'd have said it myself.

GERALD.

And the Admiral stumped up like a man He gave me a cheque for the money, and I've just this moment sent it on to Montgomerie.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Taking both his hands.*] It's awfully good of you, and I'm sure you'll never regret that you gave Gerald a chance.

ADMIRAL.

May I have a few words' private conversation with you?

LADY FREDERICK.

Of course. [*To the others.*] Make yourselves scarce.

FOULDES.

We'll go on the balcony, shall we?

ADMIRAL.

I'm sorry to trouble you, but it'll only take three minutes.

[GERALD *and* ROSE *and* FOULDES *go on to the balcony.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*When they've gone.*] There.

ADMIRAL.

Well, what I wanted to say to you was this: I like Gerald, but I think he wants guiding. D'you follow me?

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm sure he will take your advice always.

ADMIRAL.

It's a woman's hand that he wants. Now if you and I were to join forces we could keep him out of mischief, couldn't we?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, I'll come and stay with you whenever you ask me. I love giving good advice when I'm quite sure it won't be taken.

ADMIRAL.

I was thinking of a more permanent arrangement. Look here, why don't you marry me?

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear Admiral!

ADMIRAL.

I don't think an attractive woman like you ought to live alone. She's bound to get in a scrape.

LADY FREDERICK.

It's awfully good of you, but. . . .

ADMIRAL.

You don't think I'm too old, do you?

LADY FREDERICK.

Of course not. You're in the very prime of life

ADMIRAL.

There's life in the old dog yet, I can tell you.

LADY FREDERICK.

I feel sure of that. I never doubted it for a moment.

ADMIRAL.

Then what have you got against me?

LADY FREDERICK.

You wouldn't like to commit polygamy, would you?

ADMIRAL.

Eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

You see, it's not a question of marrying me only, but all my tradespeople.

ADMIRAL.

I hadn't thought of that.

LADY FREDERICK.

Besides, you're Rose's father, and I'm Gerald's sister. If we married I should be my brother's mother-in-law, and my step-daughter would be my sister. Your daughter would be your sister-in-law, and your brother would just snap his fingers at your fatherly advice.

ADMIRAL.

[*Confused.*] Eh?

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know if the prayer-book allows things like that, but if it does I think it's hopelessly immoral.

ADMIRAL.

Well, shall I tell them I've changed my mind and they can't marry?

LADY FREDERICK.

Then there'd be no reason for us to—commit the crime, would there?

ADMIRAL.

I hadn't thought of that. I suppose not.

LADY FREDERICK.

You're not cross with me, are you? I'm very much flattered, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

ADMIRAL.

Not at all, not at all. I only thought it might save trouble.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Calling.*] Gerald. Come along. [*They come in.*] We've had our little talk.

GERALD.

Everything satisfactory?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*With a look at the* ADMIRAL.] Quite.

ADMIRAL.

[*Gruffly.*] Quite.

LADY FREDERICK'S FOOTMAN *enters.*

FOOTMAN.

Captain Montgomerie wishes to know if he may see your ladyship.

LADY FREDERICK.

I'd forgotten all about him.

GERALD.

Let me go to him, shall I?

LADY FREDERICK.

No, I'm not afraid of him any longer. He can't do anything to you. And as far as I'm concerned it doesn't matter.

GERALD.

Then I'll tell him to go to the devil.

LADY FREDERICK.

No, I'm going to tell him that myself. [*To the* FOOTMAN.] Ask Captain Montgomerie to come here.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, miladi. [*Exit.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Walking up and down furiously.*] I'm going to tell him that myself.

FOULDES.

Now keep calm, Betsy.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Very deliberately.*] I shall not keep calm.

FOULDES.

Remember that you're a perfect lady.

LADY FREDERICK.

Don't interfere with me. I ate humble pie yesterday, and it didn't agree with me at all.

[FOOTMAN *enters to announce* CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE, *who follows him, and immediately withdraws.*

FOOTMAN.

Captain Montgomerie.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE

How d'you do.

[*He is obviously surprised to see the others.*

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Pleasantly.*] Quite a party, aren't we?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Yes. [*A pause.*] I hope you don't mind my coming so early?

LADY FREDERICK.

Not at all. You made an appointment for half-past ten.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I trust you have good news for me.

LADY FREDERICK.

Captain Montgomerie, every one here knows the circumstances that have brought you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I should have thought it wiser for both our sakes not to make them too public.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Very amiably.*] I don't see why you should be ashamed because you made me a proposal of marriage?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I'm sorry you should think it a laughing matter, Lady Frederick.

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't. I never laugh at an impertinence.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Taken aback.*] I beg your pardon.

LADY FREDERICK.

Surely the receipt of my brother's letter was sufficient answer for you. After that you must have guessed there was no likelihood that I should change my mind.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

What letter? I don't understand.

GERALD.

I sent you a note this morning enclosing a cheque for the money I lost to you.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I've not received it.

GERALD.

It must be waiting for you at the hotel.

[CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *pauses and looks meditatively at the assembled company.*

LADY FREDERICK.

I think there's nothing for which I need detain you longer.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Smiling.*] I don't think I've quite finished yet. Has it slipped your memory that the two bills fall due to-day? Allow me to present them.

[*He takes them out of his pocket-book.*

LADY FREDERICK.

I'm very sorry I can't pay them—at present.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I regret that I can't wait. You must pay them.

LADY FREDERICK.

I tell you it's impossible.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Then I shall get an order against you.

LADY FREDERICK.

That you may do to your heart's content.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

You realise the consequences. It's not very nice to be an undischarged bankrupt.

LADY FREDERICK.

Much nicer than to marry a rascally money-lender.

FOULDES.

May I look at these interesting documents?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Certainly. [*Blandly.*] I haven't the least wish to be offensive.

FOULDES.

[*Taking them.*] You fail lamentably in achieving your wish. Three thousand five hundred pounds in all. It seems hardly worth while to make a fuss about so small a sum.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

I'm in urgent need of money.

FOULDES.

[*Ironically.*] So rich a man as you?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Even a rich man may be temporarily embarrassed.

FOULDES.

Then be so good as to wait for one moment. [*He sits down at a table and writes a cheque.*] No sight is

more affecting than that of a millionaire in financial straits.

LADY FREDERICK.

Paradine!

FOULDES.

[*Handing the cheque.*] Now, sir, I think that settles it. Will you exchange my cheque for those bills?

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

Damn you, I forgot you.

FOULDES.

You may not be aware that it's unusual to swear in the presence of ladies.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE.

[*Looking at the cheque.*] I suppose it's all right.

[PARADINE *goes to the door and opens it.*

FOULDES.

There is the window, and here is the door. Which will you choose?

[CAPTAIN MONTGOMERIE *looks at him without answering, shrugs his shoulders and goes out.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, Pardine, you are a brick.

GERALD.

I say it's awfully good of you.

FOULDES.

Nonsense. I've got a strong sense of effect, and I always cultivate the dramatic situation.

LADY FREDERICK.

I shall never be able to pay you back, Paradine.

FOULDES.

My dear, I'm not entirely devoid of intelligence.

ADMIRAL.

Well, well, I must be off to take my constitutional.

LADY FREDERICK.

And Rose and Gerald must take care of you. We shall all meet at luncheon.

ADMIRAL.

Yes, yes.

[*The* ADMIRAL, ROSE *and* GERALD *go out.* LADY FREDERICK *goes up to* PARADINE *and takes his hands.*

LADY FREDERICK.

Thanks awfully. You are a good friend.

FOULDES.

By George, how your eyes glitter!

LADY FREDERICK.

It's only belladonna, you know.

FOULDES.

I'm not such a fool as my nephew, my dear.

LADY FREDERICK.

Why did you do it?

FOULDES.

D'you know what gratitude is?

LADY FREDERICK.

Thanks for past favours and a lively sense of benefits to come.

FOULDES.

Well, yesterday you had my sister in the hollow of your hand. She gave you great provocation, and you burnt those confounded letters.

LADY FREDERICK.

My dear Paradine, I can't get over my own magnanimity. And what are the benefits to come?

FOULDES.

Well it might be five per cent. on the capital.

LADY FREDERICK.

I don't know why you should squeeze my hands all the time.

FOULDES.

But it isn't. Look here, don't you get awfully tired of racketting about?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, my dear friend, I'm sick to death of it. I've got half a mind to retire from the world and bury myself in a hermitage.

FOULDES.

So have I, and I've bought the lease of a little house in Norfolk Street, Park Lane.

LADY FREDERICK.

Just the place for a hermitage—fashionable without being vulgar.

FOULDES.

And I propose to live there quite quietly, and I shall just subsist on a few dried herbs, don't you know

LADY FREDERICK.

But do have them cooked by a really good French chef; it makes such a difference.

FOULDES.

And what d'you say to joining me?

LADY FREDERICK.

I?

FOULDES.

You.

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, I *am* a success to-day. That's another proposal of marriage.

FOULDES.

It sounds very much like it.

LADY FREDERICK.

I've already had three this morning.

FOULDES.

Then I should think you've said "no" quite often enough.

LADY FREDERICK.

Come at ten o'clock to-morrow, and you shall see me make up.

FOULDES.

D'you think that would choke me off? D'you suppose I don't know that behind that very artificial complexion there's a dear little woman called Betsy who's genuine to the bottom of her soul?

LADY FREDERICK.

Oh, don't be so sentimental or I shall cry.

FOULDES.

Well, what is it to be?

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Her voice breaking.*] D'you like me still, Paradine, after all these years?

FOULDES.

Yes. [*She looks at him, her lips quivering. He stretches out his arms, and she, breaking down, hides her face on his shoulder.*] Now don't be an ass, Betsy. . . . I know you'll say in a minute I'm the only man you ever loved.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Looking up with a laugh.*] I shan't. . . . But what will your sister say?

FOULDES.

I'll tell her there was only one way in which I could save Charlie from your clutches.

LADY FREDERICK.

What?

FOULDES.

By marrying you myself.

LADY FREDERICK.

[*Putting up her face.*] Monster.
[*He kisses her lips.*]

THE END.

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